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Digital Native News Media: Trends and Challenges

Editor
Ramón Salaverría

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Editorial

Exploring Digital Native News Media

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Abstract
Digital native news media are becoming a blooming phenomenon, expanding globally. Up until now, however, the scholar community has paid little attention to online-born media, compared to the high interest devoted to the legacy media brands. Drawing upon the extant literature on this emerging topic, this editorial summarizes the empirical and theoretical contributions of the thematic issue entitled "Digital Native News Media: Trends and Challenges." The author highlights that the studies selected for this thematic issue not only explore the innovative characteristics and opportunities of digital native media in thirty countries, but also provide a cautionary tale about their structural problems and limitations.

Keywords
digital journalism; digital native media; legacy media; media; newswork; online-born media

Issue
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In 2020, providing a definition of digital news media, whether native or not, is not an easy task. A quarter of a century ago, when the first news publications appeared on the Web, the imprecise label 'new media' was broadly used to designate all types of digital publications. In recent years, however, journalism scholars and practitioners have started to distinguish between 'legacy' digital publications, meaning those derived from consolidated journalistic brands, and new online publications, characterized by their digital nature and recent origin. These latest publications have been labeled in various ways, such as 'digital-born' (Nicholls, Shabbir, & Nielsen, 2016), 'digital-native' (Pew Research Center, 2015; Wu, 2016), 'online-native' (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016), or even simply as 'pure players' (Sirkkunen & Cook, 2012) or 'start-ups' (Naldi & Picard, 2012; Wagemans, Witschge, & Deuze, 2016).

No matter the term used, recent research has found that digital native media proceed according to specific principles, relatively different from those used by non-native media (Küng, 2015; Tandoc, 2018). Their digital nature emphasizes the tendency towards an early adoption of new technologies (Nee, 2013), as well as a deeper experimentation with multimedia storytelling formats (Harbers, 2016) and more diversification in business models (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016; Sirkkunen & Cook, 2012). Beyond such structural aspects, digital native media show also, at least to some extent, a specific implementation of news values (Canter, 2018; Kilgo, Harlow, García-Perdomo, & Salaverría, 2018) and a distinctive approach to covering the news (Higgins Joyce & Harlow, 2020; Thomas & Cushion, 2019).

To date, most empirical research about the digital native news media phenomenon has been limited to case studies, exploring either global-reaching brands (Tandoc, 2018) or some local cases (Harbers, 2016; Wagemans et al., 2016). However, one of the main limitations of case studies is that they usually focus on the most successful and well-developed examples, the characteristics of which hardly apply to the average publications. In order to get a more nuanced idea about the contributions and problems of the average digital native news media, broader studies are needed. This is the main contribution of this issue of *Media and Communication*: Offering a comprehensive overview of the characteristics and trends of digital native news media at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century.

This thematic issue consists of 14 research articles that explore the typology, strategies, and limitations of online media. The empirical studies, some of them com-

parative and cross-national, cover media located in more than thirty countries of the world, distributed between Europe, North and South America. The research methodologies used are also diverse, comprising quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. The reader will find everything from descriptive studies comparing formal elements of the media, to algorithm-based data analyses. Most studies focus on identifying the characteristics of digital native media, although there are also some that explore the dynamics of their audiences and even the professional routines of their journalists. In short, this thematic issue brings a set of diverse and consistent studies which helps to expand the attention given to an emerging area of journalism studies.

From a geographical point of view, four articles portray the blooming phenomenon of digital native news media in Latin America. Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Rivera-Rogel, and Romero-Rodríguez (2020) weigh the level of structural development of the most salient digital native media brands in the 20 countries of the region, through a descriptive analysis of various technical and formal dimensions. Based on a comparative multiple-case study, Tejedor, Ventín, Cervi, Pulido, and Tusa (2020) review, for their part, the typology of business models used by the most successful digital native news media. A similar approach can be found in the study of da Silva and Gruszynski Sanseverino (2020), who explore the community-building strategies taken by four digital native news media in Latin America and Europe, as a means for creating sustainable business models. Finally, Rojas-Torrijos, Caro-González, and González-Alba (2020) examine the editorial strategies and business opportunities of thirteen independent Latin American podcasting initiatives, not linked to legacy brands.

Europe concentrates most of the empirical studies of this thematic issue. Based on two case studies on start-ups from Sweden and Finland, Appelgren and Lindén (2020) show the usefulness of certain journalistic routines, in this case those linked to data journalism, to promote business projects in the periphery of journalism. García-Orosa, López-García, and Vázquez-Herrero (2020) bring a multiple case study that compares six renowned native publications of the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, France, and Portugal. In their study, they find in these media a combination of traditional and new journalistic routines, which allows them to draw some boundaries of digital native journalism beyond technology. For his part, Vara-Miguel (2020) analyzes the differences between the users of legacy and digital native news media in five European countries: United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

The native digital media in Spain are the subject of up to five studies. Drawing upon a database of their own production that catalogs 3,862 native and non-native digital news outlets, Negredo, Martínez-Costa, Breiner, and Salaverría (2020) reveal not only a nuanced quantitative profile of digital media in Spain, but, in particular, the keys of an apparently paradoxical phenomenon: The multiplication of digital native news media that occurred in Spain during the years of the Great Recession (2008–2014). Also based on a large volume of data, almost 100,000 user-comments from three major Spanish digital native newspapers, Castellano Parra, Ayerdi, and Peña Fernández (2020) analyze the quality of the deliberative debate in the comments of those media's news. For their part, Majó-Vázquez, Cardenal, Sagarra, and de Simón (2020) use algorithmic methods to determine the degree of informative relevance achieved by digital native news media in the country; according to their findings, the legacy news media retain control of the brokerage positions for the general population, but digital native media are gaining relevance among younger news consumers. Pérez-Díaz, Medina, and Langa (2020) also compare the Spanish legacy and native media, although in their case they examine their respective accountability practices. The fifth study on Spain, by Mendez, Palomo, and Rivera (2020), shows the particular adaptation of journalists working in native media to the use of social networks both as an information source and as an editorial tool.

This thematic issue is completed by a couple of highly recommended studies that warn about the weaknesses and problems that affect many digital native news media. Avoiding the blindly enthusiastic vision about the possibilities of this type of media that is found in some discourses, these studies remind that these media still have a long way to go until they reach consolidation. Based on a study of 15 digital native news media in Germany, Buschow (2020) identifies various patterns in the failure of these publications, during their initial stage as start-ups. In his study he offers very revealing conclusions that, beyond their academic interest, can serve as a guide for mistakes to avoid for digital media entrepreneurs. Finally, by analyzing the evolution of media audiences in the United States, Nelson (2020) presents evidence that legacy media are more resilient than some authors have announced.

Digital native news media are here to stay, but their path to consolidation may be harder than some believe. This thematic issue brings valuable data and evidence-based insights about the initial steps of this process.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Journalism in Digital Native Media: Beyond Technological Determinism

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Abstract
This article reflects on the conceptualisation and practise of journalism in European digital native media. The way news is produced and consumed in the digital era knocks down the boundaries that once divided professionals, citizens, and activists. At the same time, significant changes highlighted in recent studies call for a new theoretical and practical approach that goes beyond the dominant perspective of technological determinism. In relation with previous research, we have selected innovative digital media platforms (*De Correspondent*, *Heidi.news*, *Eldiario.es*, *IlPost*, *Mediapart*, and *Observador*), and we have analysed the types of journalism they set out to produce, as gleaned from their public-facing communications and interviews with the platforms' founders and editors, comparing their stated goals with the journalism they produce and, lastly, we commented on changes in journalism. Digital native media explore renewed fields for journalism. The present analysis allows identifying the emergence of a series of trends in digital native media, which show a coexistence of traditional and new principles. Beyond the technological impact, the new media respond to the needs of society by incorporating the citizen as a reason for its purpose and as a collaborator in production processes. On the other hand, new players and an updated role of journalists come into play with innovative proposals designed for the current multiplatform and mobile scenario.

Keywords
digital journalism; digital native media; innovation; journalism; social media

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1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The shaping of the network society as a new structure in which morphology is over action (Castells, 1996), within a social scenario characterised by modern liquidity (Bauman, 2000), has fuelled a complex ecosystem where media and humans interact (Postman, 2000), which should be also framed within an ever-changing environment. There is where digital native media emerge, showing more or less balanced features of hybridisation between the older media logics, broadcasting and reception, and the new logics of circulation and negotiation (Chadwick, 2013). This scenario of changes calls for a review of digital journalism in native media, as it must face renewed challenges using audacious formulas, with the aim of fulfilling its tasks in the new social, political, and economic context of the network society (Zelizer, 2017).

To address this challenge, we must overcome approaches that, for digital journalism, only contemplate the old referential frameworks and study models of content production (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009), and those who point to technological determinism in journalism (Örnebring, 2010) as a cause of the changes that have taken place and those that are underway in journalism, both in professional practices and in all journalistic dimensions (Singer, 2018). It is therefore necessary to place the study of digital native media—and the journalism they practice—within the framework of diversity and interdisciplinary nature of journalism studies and in the setting of their conceptual debates (Steensen, Grøndahl

Larsen, Hågvar, & Fonn, 2019). Data over the last 25 years show that research on digital journalism is a consolidated and developing discipline, although with relevant methodological and thematic challenges to face in the coming years (Salaverría, 2019).

The steps to move forward and face the challenges must necessarily contemplate that the way in which news is produced and consumed in the digital age has broken down old boundaries between professionals, citizens, and activists and has created a new scenario in production, information uses, and consumption, redefining limits and roles in communication processes and news production (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Linaa Jensen, Mortensen, & Ørmen, 2016; Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, & Hermida, 2016). Changes in the environment and in the profession did not leave professionals unmoved, as they maintained resistance to changes in working cultures (Ryfe, 2012). Transformations in the journalistic field did not prevent many journalists committed to traditional standards to be expelled from the profession (Usher, 2010), also due to the emergence of a new panorama characterised by the hybridisation of practices (Hamilton, 2016), the ways in which information is produced and disseminated (Domingo, 2016), and the search for new narratives (Gander, 1999; Jenkins, 2003; Scolari, 2014; Shin & Biocca, 2018). Although there is still no consensus on the conceptualisation of a new language (Castro, Pérez, & Amatta, 2016), the truth is that the language of journalism is becoming more and more multichannel, polysynthetic, and integrative (Vulchanova, Baggio, Cangelosi, & Smith, 2017), within a narrative with hyper-fragmented textualities and a variety of players involved in the production of the message (Adami, 2017).

Many reports such as the *Digital News Report 2019* from the Reuters Institute (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019) and *The Impact of Digital Platforms on News and Journalistic Content* from the Centre for Media Transition (Wilding, Fray, Molitorisz, & McKewon, 2018), among others, have revealed the changes in news production and the operation of digital media, especially since the popularisation of social networks and their impact on news production (Ferrucci, 2018). From 2010 onwards, the search for ways to conquer the future of journalism has become a path of risks, threats, and opportunities (Franklin, 2016).

The search for renewed ways has driven the processes of journalistic innovation (Paulussen, 2016) and has given prominence to the application of journalistic values with good strategies for user participation (Hujanen, 2016), to the emotional burden of information (Beckett & Deuze, 2016), and to the empathy between journalists and users (Glück, 2016). Although the absence of technological determinism is recognised, journalism explores new skills and dimensions (Pavlik, 2019) due to the impact of technology. The rise of social networks and their effect on mediated communication in present societies, as well as mobile communication, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and transmedia strategies, have encouraged the search for experimental and innovative responses. Considering this context, the new media scenario shows conditions for quality digital journalism, which meets the highest ethical standards. In fact, from the conviction that the future of journalism is in the network (van der Haak, Parks, & Castells, 2012), many of the currently-existing experiences, both digital native and migrant, show that there are ways to ensure the future of journalism (Deuze, 2017).

These current digital media—meaning those that make up an alternative to the traditional media ecosystem, which innovate, use narrative formats, and have a new relationship with the audience (Cabrera Méndez, Codina, & Salaverría Aliaga, 2019)—build the future of journalism and walk under the shadow of mobile communication for perpetual contact, which encourages extensions of the person for services, personalisation of content, and a updated meaning of place and time (Vanden Abeele, de Wolf, & Ling, 2018). Production, dissemination, and consumption, as well as management, must be placed in this new ubiquitous scenario. The mobility paradigm establishes new dynamics and strategies aimed at intervention in production and consumption (Bui & Moran, 2019), which offers as a result another possible journalism.

Current online media keep distinctive features since their birth, such as digitisation, multimedia, hypertextuality, interactivity, automation, and speed (Chung, 2007; Dahlgren, 1996; Deuze, 2004), but it should be placed within a changing environment like the current one, with traditional and alternative media (Holt, Ustad Figenschou, & Frischlich, 2019) and renewed journalistic practices (Witschge, Deuze, & Willemsen, 2019) offered by the contemporary digital network society.

2. Method

The main goal of this article is to identify new conceptualisations and ways of understanding journalism through a pragmatic analysis of 6 highlighted digital native media. The analysis paves the way for the development of new ways to investigate and teach journalism, by answering the following research questions:

RQ1. Do the analysed digital native media redefine journalism as a new social actor in their foundational documents?

RQ2. Do they include the citizen in the definition of journalism and in all production phases?

RQ3. Do digital native media still depend on institutional sources?

RQ4. Could it be confirmed an effective change in the conceptualisation of journalism or an occasional use of new strategies, supports and narratives?

Table 1. Content analysis guidelines for the sample of news.

Identification	Topics	Sources
Title News organisation URL Date	Main subject (section): • Business • Climate & environment • Culture • Health • International • Politics (international) • Politics (national) • Science & tech. • Society • Sports • Various Secondary subject (specific topic) Immediacy	Use of sources (presence and volume): • Offline • Digital and 2.0 • Integration of social media in production Classification: • Government, public institutions • Politics • Experts • Media • Journalist • Private institutions • Civil society

The method has been designed ad hoc for this research. The selection of a mixed design allowed for the planning of three research methods. The first one seeks to know the self-definition of journalism raised by the analysed media. A review of online documents containing their mission and principles was carried out and, in addition, the founding members and directors of the media were contacted to find out how they apply their proposals, and also to evaluate the potential change in the journalism they exercise. Interviews were conducted in November 2019 to the following media: *Observador* (Miguel Pinheiro, director), *Heidi.news* (Serge Michel, director and co-founder), and *Il Post* (Luca Sofri, director and founder), while *De Correspondent* (Rob Wijnberg, Carmen Schaak) provided a series of documents that were also analysed.

In order to examine whether there are changes in the practices of journalism towards an alternative journalism, a content analysis (Table 1) was prepared with the two most outstanding news of the homepage, based on a sample taken in alternate days during two weeks (12–25 October) to rebuild a full week.

Third, a follow-up of the selected media (Table 2) and an exploratory study were carried out to detect its characterisation in terms of organisation of the media, business model, and used formats, as well as the presence of mechanisms and strategies linked to participation, the use of social networks, and mobile communication.

2.1. Media Selection

De Correspondent was founded in the Netherlands by Rob Wijnberg and launched in September 2013 after a crowdfunding campaign in which they raised more than one million euros in 8 days. It currently has more than 60,000 members and has initiated the launch of the English portal *The Correspondent*, after achieving a collection of 2.6 million dollars in 29 days—and 45,888 members from 130 countries. It is a highlighted case concerning the Netherlands in the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2019).

Eldiario.es was born in Spain as an initiative of a group of journalists led by Ignacio Escolar in September 2012. It has more than 34,000 members and it is managed through a society where more than 70% belongs to newsroom's workers. It is the journalistic digital native media most consumed in Spain, according to the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2019).

Table 2. Exploratory study guidelines for the news media.

Category	Characterisation
Organisation	Structure of contents Thematic specialisation Business model
Social media	Use of social networking sites in circulation
Participation	Mechanisms and strategies to enhance audience contribution
Formats and technology	Mobile communication Automation Multimedia, interactive and immersive formats

Heidi.news was launched in May 2019 in Geneve, headed by Tibère Adler and Serge Michel. The project was started with a million Swiss francs from ten founders and investors. A campaign of previous subscription allowed to reach 2,000 founding members. It is a prominent case in the Swiss context, as it became a new player supported by Google's Digital News Innovation Fund (Newman et al., 2019).

Il Post was born in April 2010 in Italy as a news aggregator project with its own content and directed by Luca Sofri. It is the journalistic digital native media most consumed in Italy, according to the *Digital News Report* (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017).

Mediapart began its history in March 2008 in France, being Edwy Plenel president and director. It was originally created based on partnership—with a total initial investment of 2.9 million euros—but in July 2019 all the shares were sold to a non-profit fund for perpetual independent management. It is the journalistic digital native media most consumed in France, according to the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2019).

Observador was born in Portugal in May 2014. José Manuel Fernandes is the editor and Miguel Pinheiro is the executive director. A group of investors took part in its foundation, being Luís Amaral the main shareholder. It is the first digital native media most consumed in Portugal (Newman et al., 2019).

3. Results

The following section summarises the main research findings. The structure is divided into two main sections. The first one, the foundational principles, exposes the vision, mission, and conceptualisation of journalism from the point of view of the different analysed media. To do so, corporate reports, previous statements of their managers, and interviews carried out for this article were used.

Second, the features of journalism performed by digital native media are analysed. For this purpose, the production process is divided into two phases: (a) production—two elements of journalism are highlighted in the analysis (sources and topics) and organisation; and (b) circulation—audience participation, formats, and platforms—although, in practice, borders are liquid. Finally, the role that journalism assumes in the new proposals is valued.

3.1. Foundational Principles

The analysed media build their projects from traditional journalistic foundations, with renewed practices and giving a high value to the reader, citizen, or user. Their differentiating factors, as far as principles are concerned, are related to the connection with society through participatory proposals and generation of communities, as well as in the interest in responding to the current context with a conception of innovative and constructive—or solutions—journalism. Categories shown in Table 3 were emerging open-coded themes based on the qualitative research, so after an overview of all statements and principles, we classified them into the categories there presented.

The integration of citizens into the environment implies enabling, favouring, and encouraging the participation and contribution of users, especially those experts in each area. In *De Correspondent*, all interventions in public discussions must be labelled with the authority that supports the participant's knowledge and experience: "We see readers as potential sources of expertise, who can enrich our journalism by actively sharing their knowledge and experiences" (Wijnberg, 2018a). On the other hand, the participatory approach seeks to build a conscious and involved public, as well as an intervening public opinion, as *Mediapart* and *Observador* state. The objectives of the Portuguese media include to explain the most complex issues of society for citizens to make better decisions (Pinheiro, personal communication, November 13, 2019). Organisations and individuals collaborate in common spaces that seek, on the one hand, to offer an alternative and differentiating journalistic proposal and, on the other hand, to be part of a community committed to what happens in society.

In this sense, analysed media express their intention to place the needs of the reader at the centre of their motivations and to provide useful information, as in the case of *Heidi.news*, focused on health and science topics from a Swiss perspective and for an "amazingly competent" audience (Michel, personal communication, November 15, 2019). The agenda-setting is essential to fulfil this purpose of reconnecting with society (*Eldiario.es*), as well as to identify the problems and needs of citizens to respond to them (*De Correspondent*): "News that helps us make the world a better place" (Wijnberg, 2018b). Again, these are principles closely connected to the participatory nature of the project, both for the opening of new research lines based on user contributions and for building a relationship of trust and loyalty. In the case of *De Correspondent* and *Heidi.news*, they define in their principles the practice of a constructive journalism, giving priority to information, exposing problems and providing possible solutions.

However, in addition to the participatory nature and social commitment of the analysed digital media, they include in their mission the management of circumstantial factors. *Eldiario.es* and *Heidi.news* propose a response to the excess of information in circulation, while verification—a value proposed due to the proliferation of fake news—expressly appears in the founding principles of *Mediapart* and *Heidi.news*, also stated by Luca Sofri (personal communication, November 19, 2019) in reference to *Il Post*. In both cases, there are factors driven by the phenomenon of social networks, confirming that it is an opportunity for the distribution of information, but also a challenge that they try to face. The emergence of

Table 3. Relation of principles manifested in digital native media.

Founding principles	*De Correspondent*	*Eldiario.es*	*Il Post*	*Heidi.news*	*Mediapart*	*Observador*
Connection with society to answer citizens' needs	•	•		•	•	
Participatory project and community's value	•		•		•	•
Priority to information, detecting problems and solutions	•			•		•
Subscription funding model	•	•		•	•	
Independence	•	•			•	•
Transparency	•	•				
Truth and quality		•	•	•	•	•
Defence of social values	•	•				•
Motivation to research and monitor	•	•		•		
Answer to information overload		•	•	•		
Innovation					•	•
Defence of journalism and the role of journalists				•	•	

new challenges demands new answers, which some digital natives explicitly reflect in their statutes. *Observador* is committed to innovation as one of its founding principles, while *Mediapart* proposes the redesign and refoundation of the press.

Following a more traditional line, all analysed media advocate for transparency, research and the watchdog role, the defence of social values, as well as the respect for the truth and the offer of quality information. In the case of *Il Post*, the need for a journalism with those characteristics was the reason for undertaking the project, according to Sofri (personal communication, November 19, 2019). In the same vein, they promise to maintain their editorial independence in a generalized way. This condition is supported by its original commitment to a membership-based funding model, which offers autonomy over the advertising-based model. *De Correspondent* declares itself completely free of advertising and sponsored content, while *Mediapart* is deliberately independent from advertising and audience results. It is, therefore, a sample of the original search for an alternative for the funding of journalism, more focused on a faithful and committed public. Finally, it is also important to mention the proposal to defend journalism and the role of the journalist, raised by *Mediapart* and *Heidi.news*, a timely principle at a time of lack of confidence in the news.

3.2. Features of Digital Native Media

3.2.1. Production

The analysed media, as noted by their foundational documents, look for innovation for presenting information, while paying special attention to the essence of journalism: audience-oriented contents and sources contrast.

In the first case, the contact with the receiver they seek to lead can help to transform topics and approaches towards meeting the needs of the audience. It is convenient to highlight, in this sense, the presence of national and international politics being 52.4% of the analysed information. This figure, however, must be weighed because of the distortion of the inclusion of *Eldiario.es*, since Spain was at that time in pre-election campaign and the political scenario covered almost all the information published on the days we collected the data. If *Eldiario.es* is excluded from the sample, 43.2% of political information is obtained. In total, 78.0% of the news responds to current events. However, *De Correspondent* stands out with 75.0% of analysed news that does not stick to it.

As shown in Figure 1, it is also remarkable the importance obtained by the topics of society (53.6%) and, to a lesser extent, economy (1.2%), that account for most of the media information analysed against what we could call traditional journalism.

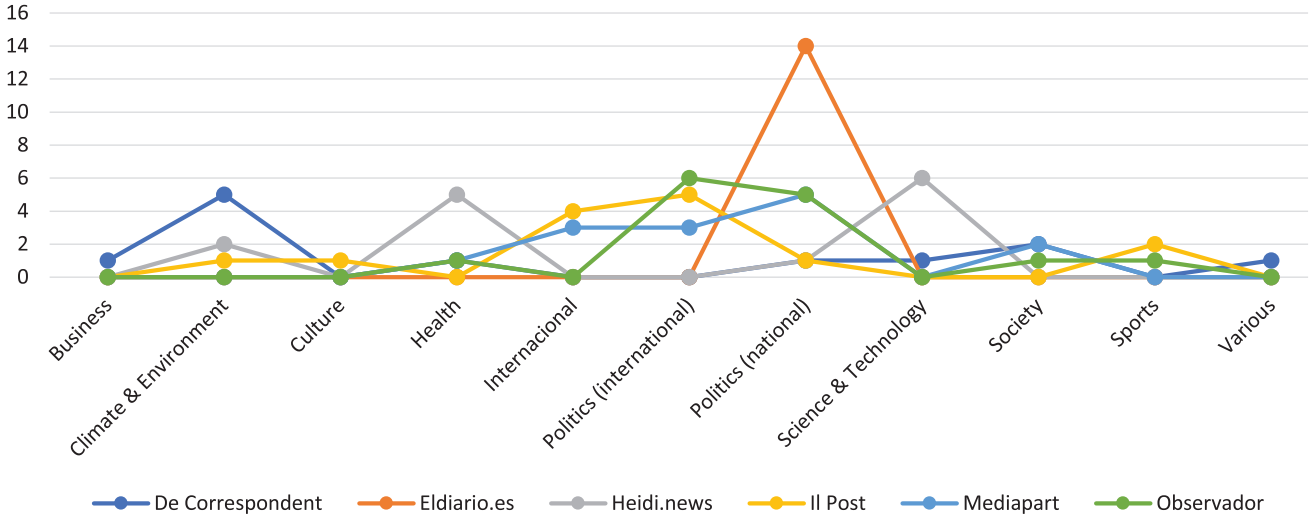

Figure 1. News classified by topics in analysed digital native media.

The shift in topics is accompanied by a change in the treatment of sources, as shown in Figure 2 (an average of 3.4 sources present per piece of news), and a broadening of the spectrum of the society reflected with the inclusion of citizens (present in 30.5% of the news), institutional sources (53.7% government; 18.3% political parties; 8.5% private institutions), and experts (24.4%). Regarding digital sources, 23.2% of the analysed news make use of them, mainly by inserting content from social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.

3.2.2. Alternatives in Media Organisation

In the selected cases, some strategies emerge and mark a break with the more conventional models in terms of structure, specialisation, and business. Faced with the usual proposal of a website organised by sections, topical, and broad thematic coverage, *De Correspondent* focuses on the figure of the 'correspondent' or journalist and collections. In this way, the Dutch media organises their stories based on the signature and thematic classifications, which correspond to contemporary universal debates, without a direct link to current news. In this way, the user can follow and prioritise the exposure to information of certain specialised authors—42 in October 2019, together with 446 invited signatures—and of specific approaches—such as the impact of artificial intelligence, euthanasia, climate emergency, etc. The proposal of thematic collections that the user can follow also appears in *Mediapart* ('Dossiers'), *Heidi.news* ('Les Explorations') and *Observador* (labels). On the other hand, the Swiss medium *Heidi.news* focuses on two issues relevant to its community—health and science—around which all its production revolves.

Regarding the business model, media based on advertising coexist with the support of members (*Eldiario.es*, *Il Post*, and *Observador*) with projects based mainly on the contributions of its members

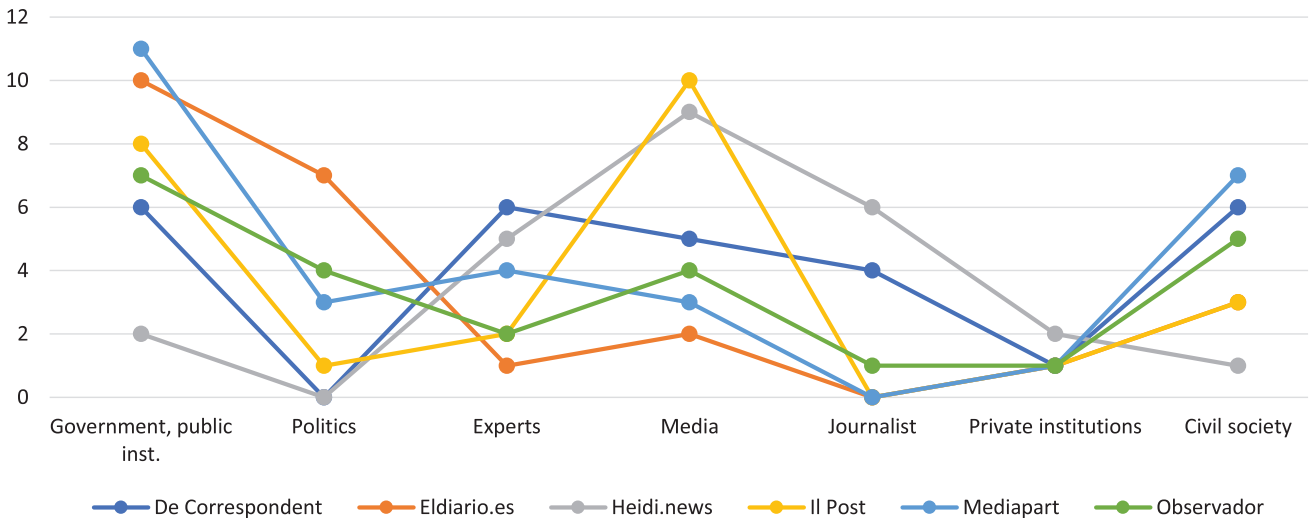

Figure 2. News classified by sources in analysed digital native media.

(*De Correspondent*, *Heidi.news*, and *Mediapart*), being the membership in this last group a requirement for full access, newsletters, and participation.

3.2.3. Integrating Participation in the Dynamics of the Media

The participatory nature of the media is one of the most characteristic features in digital native media, from conservative proposals such as the contribution through comments—present in all the cases analysed except in *Heidi.news*—to the creation of communities and the promotion of conversation. The case of *De Correspondent* should be stressed out, where the conversation editor Gwen Martél is responsible for facilitating that the topics addressed are enriched with the knowledge and experience of readers, as well as to start new stories. In this way, a conversation arises from each article where members debate with journalists and experts. In other cases, participation is activated through direct contact with the authors through email as in *Observador* or *Heidi.news*, or a specific space as in 'Eldiario.es responde,' where Ignacio Escolar answers the questions of readers on a weekly basis. *Observador* also opens channels for users' participation in interviews and reports, to send questions, suggest perspectives, or tell their stories (Pinheiro, personal communication, November 13, 2019).

Another of the emerging initiatives to connect with the public and society is the celebration of thematic events, meetings with partners, debates, and presentations (*Heidi.news*, *Eldiario.es*, *Il Post*, and *Observador*). In the case of the Italian media, they organise 'TALK' events, in addition to meetings with the director and journalists in different cities and the journalism course at the Scuola Belleville in Milan—a modality aimed at training and dissemination, as also developed by *De Correspondent* through the Correspondent College program. *Observador* organises the program 'Conversas' with guests and partner companies, fundamentally addressing social issues, volunteering, communities, and education. In *Mediapart*, the 'Mediapart Live' series is based on live discussions broadcast on the web from the newsroom.

However, to contribute to research and journalistic production, the media enable channels where users can give clues, make leaks, and suggest corrections. In the case of *De Correspondent*, *Observador*, and *Heidi.news*, contributions are directed to journalists; in *Eldiario.es*, through the PGP code, secure mailbox in *Fíltrala*, and email; and in *Mediapart*, from the *FrenchLeaks* website, through web contact, email, postal mail, Tor address, or a mailbox.

Finally, the search for participation in digital natives is reflected in the commitment to create meeting spaces for its most loyal audience, its journalists, and other entities. *Eldiario.es* hosts blogs from different organisations and social groups to create a space for plural debate with common values, and *Il Post* has numerous journalists' blogs and a blog of the news company itself. However, some projects stand out because of their community value and their participatory proposal: *Mediapart* places 'Le Club' section as a central aspect, where subscribers' blogs are located. These spaces show intense activity and are present on the homepage of the medium, through the recommendation of other subscribers and the newsroom. In addition, they allow to create a 'participatory edition' on a topic, create portfolios with photos, or add events to the media agenda.

3.2.4. Formats and Platforms to Make Journalism

The media analysed have adopted multimedia hypertextual creation in a natural way, especially with regard to the combination of text with images and video, as well as the interconnection of documents. However, there are some outstanding strategies in terms of how to present the information that give rise to trends. *Il Post* is committed to brief contents in the 'flashes' and 'bits' sections, while *Observador* creates a type of article called 'explainer' that answers the big questions surrounding current events to build a context that can be addressed by any reader. Multimedia specials are a relevant format in the innovation of *Eldiario.es*, with significant cases such as '*Las Llaves de Europa'* or '*Detrás del paraíso*.' On the other hand, the French media *Mediapart* is committed to different multimedia formats that provide visual character, such as 'panoramique,' 'les documentaires,' and 'les portfolios.'

One of the most important trends worldwide and also in digital natives is the revaluation of audio formats, from the stories read in *De Correspondent* to podcasts in the same medium and in *Eldiario.es*, *Il Post*, *Mediapart* and *Observador*—the latter also integrates its own radio, *Rádio Observador*. The sections dedicated to information verification, in response to the proliferation of fake news, are also reflected in these media: El Detector from *Eldiario.es* and *Maldita.es*, *FrenchLeaks* from *Mediapart*, and Fact Check from *Observador*.

Among the paths explored by digital native media is the edition of thematic books (*De Correspondent*) and monographic magazines (*Eldiario.es*), as well as the production of documentaries in collaboration with other media (*De Brug*, co-produced by *De Correspondent* and *KRO-NCRV*). The search for a new revenue stream drives the opening of branded content lines. This is identified in ED Creativo of *Eldiario.es* and in Observador Lab from *Observador*.

As regards channels and platforms for distribution, the mobile device is a key element with different strategies. On the one hand, the analysed digital natives opt for their own application for these devices, while *De Correspondent* and *Heidi.news* prefer to maintain a responsive website that facilitates consumption on mobile phones and tablets as well. Social networks are spaces where all digital media take positions, especially on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, but also in other digital services where they give access to their content:

YouTube, Soundcloud, Medium, LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Pinterest. In the case of *Il Post*, it has also explored smart speakers, while *Observador* has an app for smartwatch. Instant messaging applications are used by *Eldiario.es* and *Observador* to spread their news.

However, all the media analysed give a relevant presence to newsletters with different focus and frequency of publication. The most common is the daily or weekly news summary, but there are also thematic examples like 'Les flux' from *Heidi.news* on science and health.

3.2.5. Do Journalism and the Role of Journalists Change?

Is there a transformation in journalism and the role of journalists? The overall response is a negative one: "The role of journalists remains the same: asking difficult questions and explaining complex topics" (Pinheiro, personal communication, November 13, 2019); "The role of the journalist is unchanged: looking for the truth….He's a humble craftsman" (Michel, personal communication, November 15, 2019). However, the proposals of some media do imply a shift in the approach, due to circumstantial needs or by definition. In the case of *Il Post*, its small newsroom implies that all journalists have to know how to do everything (Sofri, personal communication, November 19, 2019). On the other hand, in the *De Correspondent*, the mission of 'unbreaking the news' involves a change as regards what news are, how are they produced, and how we pay for them.

The journalistic role is more a relationship than a property (Carlson, 2017), so it is being transformed, voluntarily or required by the context, and based on the same foundational principles of journalism through alternative ways of executing it, considering the communities, participation, and the need for a constructive or solutions journalism. Challenges faced by the analysed digital native media have to do with over-information, offering distinctive information (Pinheiro, personal communication, November 13, 2019) and adjusting to the availability of the audience (Michel, personal communication, November 15, 2019). However, challenges are very diverse in each case: They will look for growth (*Heidi.news*), the consolidation of a multimedia newsroom (*Observador*), and the success of an English version for the world (*De Correspondent*).

4. Conclusion

Digital native media emerge to respond to needs of various kinds—in the market, in society, and in the models of journalism—and they are created by experienced journalists with a career in legacy media. In this sense, projects have a degree of innovation that make them different and, beyond the force exerted by technology, they offer renewed approaches that coexist with the foundational principles of journalism. The main difference of these news digital native media—*De Correspondent*, *Heidi.news*, *Eldiario.es*, *Il Post*, *Mediapart*, and *Observador*—is in the value they give to their community, through participatory strategies and thematic specialisation. In other words, they propose an even more audience-centric approach to journalism, in different degrees of development according to each organisation.

The journalist and the media do not pretend to be players of society and politics but, rather, continue to seek to be a filter in an increasingly complex society. Some of them refer directly to 'constructive journalism' that exposes problems and provides solutions to allow their audience to make good decisions. However, the limits of their work are liquid and permeable to society. Changes in the approach of journalistic projects progressively incorporate participatory dimensions, in terms of community and conversation—notably in *The Correspondent* and *Mediapart*—and present transformations that affect the perception of the updated role of journalists (Berganza, Lavín, & Piñeiro-Naval, 2017; Carlson, 2017; Mellado, Márquez-Ramírez, Mick, Oller Alonso, & Olivera, 2017; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). They claim for the essence of journalism from which some media have moved away: topics that interest the audience—great debates and thematic specialisation, although with a subtle change of news values (in many cases, loss of the immediacy)—and a special care to sources and the contrast between them.

The hybridisation of logics of production and circulation mark a double flow: (a) towards the essence of journalism; and (b) towards the incorporation of new players and roles. In the latter, and closely related to the audience-centric approach, citizens access the media in all phases of production and circulation of information, usually identified as expert sources, of justified and proven relevance. Hybrid actions are also implemented in the production and circulation of information by combining online and offline actions (virtual communities, meetings, and debates with sources). Finally, formats and technical innovations are adapted to circumstances, especially in reference to the mobile and the use of newsletters for distribution, while automation, immersive narratives, and transmedia strategies still stand out as emerging and underused techniques. As for the business model, they are based primarily on subscriptions and memberships, which will require a great differentiation to react to the symptoms of exhaustion of this model (Newman et al., 2019).

In general terms, 'alternative' has become a brand image throughout the media, despite having been unable to change the field of journalism itself (Bourdieu, 2000), which depends not only on the underlying technological apparatus but also on a complex structural framework in which some outstanding digital native media are significantly incorporating participation, as tested in this study. The so-called 'constructive journalism' or 'solutions journalism' (Aitamurto & Varma, 2018; McIntyre, 2019) is spreading around the globe and also demanding more attention from the conceptual and the critical

perspective (Mast, Coesemans, & Temmerman, 2019), although this is not new (Bro, 2019). The perspective of digital journalism from technological determinism passes above the journalistic values and practices that persist, as we have mentioned here. Journalism is more than technology (Zelizer, 2019), so it is important to consider technology as a driver or even a trigger for some purposes, but there are many edges to explore. Although journalism, once a static communicative process, has become a flow that includes media, journalists, sources, and audiences, one cannot infer from this alone a general change in its conceptualisation. As the field of digital journalism undergoes redefining changes (Eldridge, Hess, Tandoc Jr., & Westlund, 2019), other types of journalism are arising in a phase that is gaining ground facing intelligent automation and in which a nascent 5G technology could drive changes in the production, dissemination, and consumption of news.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

Cross-National Similarities and Differences between Legacy and Digital-Born News Media Audiences

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Abstract
The decline of the news business model for print newspapers in many Western countries and the digital disruption caused by the Internet have influenced the rise of digital-born news media. These new media are different from legacy brands in terms of business models, distribution strategies, corporate organisation, and editorial priorities. It would be expected that the different nature of both legacy and digital-born news media has driven to two types of significantly different audiences. This article aims to analyse whether there are significant differences between the users of these two types of media, by comparing the online audiences of five European countries' (United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy) legacy and digital-born media brands in 2015 and 2019. The article will focus on four aspects: demographic and socioeconomics profiles (sex, age, income and level of education); interest in news; payment for online news; and media trust.

Keywords
digital-born media; legacy brands; media brands; media trust; paywalls

Issue
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1. Introduction

The rise of the Internet as a content distributor is at the epicentre of the crisis of the media business model. Technological advances have reduced the entry barriers to content creation and distribution by making professional-quality production tools widely accessible at low price (Küng, 2008). The emergence of new news providers and technological distribution platforms has changed the way audiences get news (Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2012; Küng, Picard, & Towse, 2008; McDowell, 2011), making the general audience's news 'diet' more abundant and diverse than ever. According to the Digital News Report (2015 and 2019), 62% of respondents use five or more news sources weekly (65% in 2019), and 42% of them read seven or more different sources (45% in 2019), from both online and/or offline outlets (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019; Newman, Levy, & Nielsen, 2015).

Specifically, this technological difference between online and offline products has guided research on news consumption trends, mostly from the uses and gratifications field. According to this framework, users make a rational decision, evaluating utilities, features, and rewards provided by every kind of media (Lin, Salwen, & Abdulla, 2005). Many of these studies have focused on analysing the displacement or complementary effect of print editions by digital newspapers (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Flavian & Gurrea, 2009; Newell, Pilotta, & Thomas, 2008; Westlund & Färdigh, 2012), with mixed results, largely due to the different methodologies applied (Chyi & Lee, 2013). Some authors suggest that the Internet has had a competitive displacement effect on traditional media (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004; Filistrucchi, 2005; Ha & Fang, 2012). On the contrary, Westlund and Fardigh (2015) find emerging patterns of complementary news consumption.

Probably, the difficulty in reaching clear conclusions has its roots in the fact that the majority of studies have a technological focus: they tend to look at displacement and complementarity through platforms. However, few studies have focused on this issue from a media brands perspective. Given the increased competition and multichannel media consumption, it seems crucial for media companies to build up and strengthen their brands.

2. Theoretical Framework

Different media distributors and media formats used to be clearly different media products with distinctive production, marketing, and consumption patterns (McDowell, 2011). However, the Internet has led to the foundation of the so-called new pure players or digital-born news media. These new media outlets are different from legacy brands in terms of business models, distribution strategies, corporate organisation, and editorial priorities (Nicholls, Shabbir, & Nielsen, 2016). They only operate online and are carving out a profitable and sustainable business on the net, using new business models as the so-called niche journalism (Cook & Sirkkunen, 2013). Meanwhile, legacy media usually manages both kinds of sources, offline (print or broadcast) and online. Although there is not a unique definition of legacy firms, they present some common traits: Their brand heritage is anchored in the quality of their customer relations, as well as in the quality of their products (McDowell, 2011; Tungate, 2005), and their consumers value legacy brand identities (Lowe & Stavitsky, 2016). For legacy brands, it is economically rational to cover news in a quality-oriented manner. By including quality as a part of their brand identity, media outlets find an audience that is ready to pay money, or at least attention, for this sort of coverage (Siegert, Gerth, & Rademacher, 2011). From the managerial point of view, the majority of full-time jobs for journalists are in this shrinking legacy media sector (McChesney, 2012), a sector with high costs that is vulnerable to downturns in the economy (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

It would be natural to expect two different types of audience as a result of the difference between legacy and digital-born news outlets. This hypothesis is based on previous research, suggesting that users/audience perceive and use different types of news differently. Ots (2010) asserted that media brands create value for audiences wanting specific content and advertisers wanting to reach specific audiences. As a result, brand equity creates a different brand image in people's mind and so far, a different response in consumers. A strong brand will foster stronger attitudes and behaviours than those fostered by a weak or anonymous brand (Siegert, Förster, Chan-Olmsted, & Ots, 2015). In communicating the key characteristics of legacy brands, media managers could differentiate their outlets from those of their competitors. As a result, they prevent imitation, stabilise, and increase their audience in the long term. However, there is no guarantee that audience perception of the legacy brands would be in line with media managers' intentions. In fact, contrary to expectations, legacy outlets and digital born media are not getting substantially different audiences (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016).

The analysis of the two kinds of audiences proposed in this article seeks to show the relevance of brands in news markets. This study complements others with a more media-centric, technological approach (Siegert et al., 2015), following the path of other scholars (Benson, Blach-Ørsten, Powers, Willig, & Vera Zambrano, 2012; Humprecht & Büchel, 2013; Stetka & Örnebring, 2013).

This article focuses on three areas of research that have been analysed in previous studies of the differences and similarities between legacy media and digital-born new media: audience segmentation; revenue models; and media trust. The conclusions of this study could be of interest not only from a journalistic point of view, but from a managerial perspective.

2.1. Audience Segmentation

As stated above, one of the relevant topics in the studies of online and offline media has been the differences in the uses and gratifications perceived by the two types of audiences (Filistrucchi, 2005; Newell et al., 2008; Westlund & Färdigh, 2011). New and different types of media formats should create different kinds of audiences in relation to their needs and motivations to use media and produce more audience segmentation. In that sense, the new digital landscape contributes to a greater heterogeneity in markets (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010), due to the abundance of digital media, which incentivises the specialisation and, therefore, the targeting of smaller audiences defined by multiple and segmented interests (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016; Fortunati, Deuze, & de Luca, 2014). Along the same lines, previous research has identified attitudinal variables as key factors driving the media selection process when compared with traditional media (Chyi & Chadha, 2011; Chyi & Lasorsa, 2002; de Waal, Schönbach, & Lauf, 2005).

By contrast, Webster and Ksiazek (2012) assert that the Internet has concentrated a vast amount of the audience attention around the leading news organisations, which are quite undifferentiated and difficult to be segmented and predictable. According to Arrese and Kaufmann (2016), these two apparently contradictory views are not necessarily incompatible, and other reasonings must be studied to understand and find answers to the homogenisation versus segmentation debate. This article adds a new focus to this question, studying whether different types of media (legacy brands or digital-born) create significantly different readership segments.

2.2. Revenue Models

Over the last few years, online news organisations all over the world have erected paywalls (Arrese, 2016;

Sjøvaag, 2016). For decades, legacy newspapers have been oriented towards protecting their current markets, serving existing customers, and reacting to innovations in media markets. They were more focused on defending their flagship brand and customer base than on being proactive (Herbert & Thurman, 2007; Holm, 2016). However, the success of certain media firms, such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* (Mensing, 2007), and the need to compensate for losses in the traditional advertising market (Sjøvaag, 2016) have changed the revenue strategies of media firms, from free to pay.

An increasing amount of literature has addressed this issue from several perspectives: the effect of paywalls on the spread of quality news in society (Collins, 2011; Pickard & Williams, 2014); the potential predictors of willingness to pay for digital news, like sociodemographic variables (Chiou & Tucker, 2013; Chyi & Lee, 2013; Cook & Attari, 2012; Goyanes, 2014; Kammer, Boeck, Hansen, & Hadberg, 2015; Wang, 2011); interest in news and frequency of readership of digital news (Goyanes & Vara-Miguel, 2017; Oh, Animesh, & Pinsonneault, 2016) or previous payment for print news (Chyi, 2005, 2012). Notwithstanding that, the factors related to likeliness to pay for digital news are still unclear and multifold (Himma-Kadakas & Kõuts, 2015).

The study of revenue models from a brand perspective provides new insight into this area of research. In the online news market, with an abundant supply of news available, news has been perceived as a highly substitutable commodity, and the reluctance to pay for digital news is widespread among the public (Gundlach & Hofmann, 2017). On the other hand, the success of certain firms is attributed to the quality and exclusiveness of the content (Vara-Miguel, Sanjurjo-San Martín, & Díaz-Espina, 2014) and the presence of strong brands (Bleyen & van Hove, 2010; McDowell, 2011; Mensing, 2007; Sjøvaag, 2016). The question is whether the use of legacy media versus digital-born media turns into a greater commitment to paying for digital news.

2.3. Media Trust

In the current media scenario, with the emergence of new alternative channels of information, some questions have arisen regarding the relationship between trust and media. Although research on media trust is abundant, the literature lacks consensus, not only on the notion of media trust, but also on the elements or dimensions that comprise it, probably due to the variety of disciplines and methodologies applied (Kiousis, 2001; Kohring & Matthes, 2007). While early studies focus on the trust generated by sources with a clear persuasive aim (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; Hovland & Weiss, 1951), in subsequent years scholars focused on the credibility of channels and media outlets (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Westley & Severin, 1964) and the relationship between trust and media use (Abel & Wirth, 1977; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Most of these studies show a modest relation between media trust and media consumption, and those who trust media the most are more likely to use traditional outlets, while sceptics pay more attention to alternative sources (Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Kiousis, 2001; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, 2005).

Finally, recent worries about fake news, misinformation, and the often-low trust in the news have highlighted the value of legacy brands as trusted media. According to the Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2019), over a quarter (26%) of the respondents have started to rely on more reputable news sources (40% in the US), and a further quarter have stopped using sources of dubious reputation. The analysis of media trust from this brand perspective could help to understand whether trust is perceived as a significant asset of legacy media when compared with digital-born media.

3. Research Questions and Hypothesis

As stated above, the aim of this article is to investigate whether the nature of legacy media brands or digital-born media is relevant in explaining audience differentiation in online news markets, considering the issues discussed in the previous section. More specifically, this article analyses whether or not there are significant differences between online users of these two types of media firms by comparing the digital audiences of the main legacy and digital-born media brands of five European countries (United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy) in 2015 and 2019. The specific research questions are as follows:

RQ1. Do online audiences of legacy media and digital-born media have significantly different demographic and socioeconomic profiles?

RQ2. Are online audiences of legacy media and digital-born media significantly different in their interest in news and in their frequency of news consumption?

RQ3. Do online audiences of legacy media and digital-born media differ significantly in their behaviour and attitudes toward payment for online news content?

RQ4. Do online audiences of legacy media and digital-born media differ significantly in their media trust perception?

The general hypothesis is that significant differences exist in all of the questions under research, something that seems reasonable considering the different natures of these two types of media firms. A priori, it could be stated that legacy brands have a similar audience, in terms of profile and behaviour, to that of traditional media outlets (higher age, income and level of education; RQ1), they declare more interest in news and, con-

sequently, access news more frequently (RQ2) and are more likely to pay for digital news (RQ3). Finally, legacy users are more inclined to trust mass media and are more sceptical about social media (RQ4), in contrast to digital-born media audiences.

4. Method

4.1. Sample, Variables, and Measurement

The analysis is based on data corresponding to the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy from the survey carried out for the Digital News Report 2015 and 2019, in which some questions directly related to this article were included. YouGov, using an online questionnaire in late January–early February 2014 and 2019, conducted the survey fieldwork, commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The data were weighted to targets based on census/industry-accepted data, such as age, gender, region, newspaper readership, and social grade, to reflect the population of each country. The sample is reflective of the adult population (18+) with access to the Internet. As the survey deals with news consumption, it filtered out anyone who said that they had not consumed any news in the past month (average around 3%) in order to ensure that irrelevant responses did not adversely affect data quality (see Table 1).

In order to get the two types of readers (legacy users and digital-born users), a subsample was generated using the responses to the question: 'Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader)? Please select all that apply.' Respondents have to select options from a list of each country's main legacy and digital-born outlets. According to their responses, two types of readers were obtained: those who use more legacy media than digital-born media and those who use more digital-born media than legacy outlets ($N_{2015} = 6{,}677$, 65.8% of the total sample; $N_{2019} = 6{,}532$, 64.9% of the total sample). Additionally, those who use exactly the same number of legacy and digital-born media have been excluded from the subsample in order to have two clear-cut groups.

Once the grouping variable is established, we select those survey questions used as variables to examine the hypotheses related to the RQs. All the variables, as explained below, should be considered as reasonable—not exhaustive—proxy measures for the overarching characteristics under investigation.

Demographic and socioeconomic profiles (RQ1) were measured through four variables: gender (male/female); age (18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 or more); household income (low income, less than €19,999; medium income, €20,000 to €39,999; high income, €40,000 or more); and education level (no completed secondary school/completed high school or Bac-A levels/completed professional qualification/completed bachelor's degree/completed master's or doctoral degree).

Interest in news and frequency of news consumption (RQ2) were measured through the following questions: 'How interested, if at all, would you say you are in the news?' (extremely interested/very interested/somewhat interested/not very interested/not at all interested) and 'Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper, or online)' (less often than once a week/once a week to six times a week/once a day to five times a day/six times a day or more).

Attitudes towards payment for digital news were used as proxy indicators of the preference for revenue models more dependent on free or paid content (RQ3). The exact question asked was 'Have you paid for online news content, or accessed a paid online news service in the last year? (this could be digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription or one-off payment for an article or app)' (yes/no).

Finally, we measured the media trust (RQ4) of the audience through two questions. The first, 'Thinking about news in general, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I think you can trust most news most of the time,"' focused on the credibility of the media in general, but the second asked about the audience's trust in the specific media outlets they used: 'Thinking specifically about news sources that you use, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I think I can trust most of the news that I use most of the time."' The possible answers to both questions were strongly disagree/tend to disagree/neither agree nor disagree/tend to agree/strongly agree.

Table 1. Sample size and internet penetration (2015 and 2019).

	2015		2019	
Country	Sample size	Internet penetration	Sample size	Internet penetration
United Kingdom	2,149	90%	2,023	95%
Germany	1,969	89%	2,022	96%
France	1,991	83%	2,005	93%
Spain	2,026	75%	2,005	93%
Italy	2,006	59%	2,006	92%

Source: Internet World Stats (n.d.).

Table 2. Subsample: Legacy and digital-born users (2015 and 2019).

	2015				2019			
Country	Legacy users	%	Digital-born users	%	Legacy users	%	Digital-born users	%
United Kingdom	1,238	86.9%	186	13.1%	1,294	92.0%	112	8.0%
Germany	999	82.2%	217	17.8%	9,24	73.9%	327	26.1%
France	783	70.9%	321	29.1%	786	72.9%	292	27.1%
Spain	1,170	80.9%	276	19.1%	1,182	83.1%	240	16.9%
Italy	1,142	76.8%	345	23.2%	1,118	81.3%	257	18.7%
Total	5,332	79.9%	1,345	20.1%	5,304	81.2%	1,228	18.8%

4.2. Statistical Analysis

We decided to use the chi-squared test to analyse categorical variables (gender, income, and payment for online news) and the Mann-Whitney U-test for metric variables (education, age, interest in news, frequency of news consumption, media trust, and trust in your own media). The selection of non-parametric tests, including metric variables, was due to the lack of normality in the distribution of values. An examination of the standardised skewness coefficient and the standardised kurtosis coefficient revealed serious departures from normality for all of the metric variables.

5. Results

Table 2 shows the distribution and evolution of the two audience groups. Most of the respondents used more legacy media than digital-born media as a source of news in all of the countries studied. Five years later, this trend was stronger and the percentage of respondents getting news from legacy media grew in every country except Germany.

In order to test if a significant difference exists between the groups of readers in terms of sociodemographic variables (RQ1), a chi-squared was used to analyse gender and income and a Mann-Whitney U-test was applied for age and level of education. The data revealed a statistically significant difference in 2015 between groups in gender (X^2 (1, N = 6,677) = 23.65, p = 0.000), income (X^2 (2, N = 5,880) = 16.68, p = 0.000), and education (U = 3300886, p = 0.000), but not age (U = 3471020, p = 0.065). Table 3 shows that in 2015, male audiences (52%) with high income (28%) and a bachelor's or postgraduate degree (38%) tend to use more legacy media than born-digital. Five years later, there were significant differences in all sociodemographic variables: gender (X^2 (1, N = 6,531) = 26.24, p = 0.000); income (X^2 (2, N = 5,651) = 11.90, p = 0.003), education (U = 3202889, p = 0.000); and age (U = 3082176, p = 0.000).

Table 4 shows the same trend in 2019. Those who use more legacy media than born-digital media tend to be male, with higher levels of income and education than those who read more digital-born outlets. Surprisingly, respondents under 44 years read more legacy brands (45%) than born-digital media (33%), while those over 45 years use more native media (66%) than legacy media (54%).

By countries, the data shows that Spain and especially France differ from the general trend, as there are no sociodemographic differences between the two groups in these countries, either in 2015 or in 2019.

With regard to the amount of interest in news and the level of news consumption (RQ2), the data shows significant differences between the two groups in 2015—interest in news (U = 3051343, p = 0.000) and frequency of news use (U = 3185492, p = 0.000)—and in 2019—interest in news (U = 2922834, p = 0.000) and frequency of news use (U = 3012158, p = 0.000).

In 2015 (see Table 5), those who use more legacy media were more interested in news (34% are extremely interested, versus 24% of native users) and read news more frequently (61% of legacy users access six times a day or more, versus 50% of born-digital users). Five years later (see Table 6), the data shows similar differences between the two groups: 30% of legacy users are extremely interested in news, versus 21% of native users, and the 27% of them access 6 times a day or more to news, versus the 17% of born-digital users. The differences between the two groups of users occur in all the countries analysed, except France in 2015, where there are no significant differences in both variables: interest in news (U = 120539, p = 0.257) and frequency of news use (U = 124422, p = 0.770). However, in 2019, significant differences appear between the two groups of French users.

The results on attitudes toward payment for online news content (RQ3) show also significant differences between the two groups in 2015 (X^2 (1, N = 6,557) = 20.23, p = 0.000) and 2019 (X^2 (1, N = 6,333) = 30.20, p = 0.000). In 2015 (see Table 5), those who read more legacy brands than born-digital media were more likely to pay for online news (12%) than those who use native media (8%). In 2019, the percentages were 13% and 7%, respectively (see Table 6). Significant differences occur in all countries except France (X^2 (1, N = 1,078) = 3.17, p = 0.075) and Spain (X^2 (1, N = 1,426) = 2.79, p = 0.094) in 2015, and Italy in 2019 (X^2 (1, N = 1,310) = 1.63, p = 0.201).

Table 3. Frequency distributions for sociodemographic variables, 2015 (%).

	Legacy users						Born-digital users					
	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT
Sociodemographic												
Gender												
Male	52.4	52.3	55.6	51.5	52.6	50.1	45.0	36.6	47.0	47.7	45.3	45.5
Female	47.6	47.7	44.4	48.5	47.4	49.9	55.0	63.4	53.0	52.3	54.7	54.5
Age												
18 to 24	9.5	11.3	10.4	6.4	10.2	8.1	8.3	14.0	2.3	4.7	8.0	12.5
25 to 34	15.9	13.3	16.6	12.4	19.9	16.5	15.3	11.8	9.7	14.0	19.9	18.3
35 to 44	19.1	16.3	19.7	16.6	22.6	19.6	19.0	9.7	18.4	19.6	22.5	20.9
45 to 54	18.5	20.4	18.4	17.6	18.2	17.3	18.4	21.5	23.0	18.7	15.2	15.9
55 to 64	23.9	22.0	19.6	29.5	23.2	26.7	24.5	22.6	24.0	25.2	27.5	22.6
65 or more	13.1	16.6	15.2	17.5	5.9	11.6	14.6	20.4	22.6	17.8	6.9	9.9
Household income												
Low	22.2	22.9	22.6	18.5	25.0	20.5	23.8	36.7	29.4	13.0	27.7	20.3
Medium	49.1	45.3	49.8	56.3	45.3	51.5	53.4	45.6	48.5	62.7	48.2	56.3
High	28.7	31.8	27.5	25.2	29.7	27.9	22.8	17.7	22.2	24.3	24.1	23.3
Education												
No completed Sec. school	10.0	9.1	9.1	15.2	7.2	11.1	12.3	12.4	9.7	14.0	6.2	17.1
Completed High school	31.2	30.5	24.0	28.6	23.9	47.4	33.5	32.8	23.5	31.2	21.4	52.2
Prof. Qualification	20.9	16.0	36.4	24.9	23.4	7.1	23.0	24.2	45.2	23.4	27.5	4.3
Bachelor's	23.3	30.7	15.3	18.8	37.0	11.3	20.9	24.7	12.4	19.9	38.0	11.3
Master's/Doctoral	14.7	13.7	15.1	12.5	8.5	23.1	10.3	5.9	9.2	11.5	6.9	15.1

Table 4. Frequency distributions for sociodemographic variables, 2019 (%).

	Legacy users						Born-digital users					
	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT
Sociodemographic												
Gender												
Male	51.9	50.8	55.1	52.2	51.9	50.6	43.9	52.3	42.2	40.8	46.4	43.6
Female	48.1	49.2	44.9	47.8	48.1	49.4	56.1	47.7	57.8	59.2	53.6	56.4
Age												
18 to 24	10.8	12.3	12.1	12.5	9.4	8.3	6.8	12.5	2.8	9.2	4.6	8.5
25 to 34	16.6	17.4	16.5	18.6	16.5	14.4	12.2	17.9	11.0	12.7	10.4	12.4
35 to 44	17.8	17.3	17.1	14.6	21.7	17.0	14.9	16.1	12.5	18.5	13.3	14.7
45 to 54	18.2	16.6	19.0	15.4	19.6	20.0	20.7	14.3	21.4	19.5	21.7	22.9
55 to 64	21.4	15.8	20.5	19.6	24.5	26.8	29.5	12.5	35.8	22.6	38.3	28.3
65 or more	15.2	20.6	14.7	19.4	8.3	13.5	16.0	26.8	16.5	17.5	11.7	13.2
Household income												
Low	28.9	25.0	27.6	31.8	33.8	26.7	29.0	35.9	22.6	32.9	32.6	26.0
Medium	47.1	44.3	47.8	39.7	44.9	57.2	51.6	42.4	62.2	40.2	46.5	60.2
High	24.0	30.7	24.6	28.5	21.3	16.2	19.4	21.7	15.2	26.9	20.9	13.9
Education												
No completed Sec. school	31.4	22.9	22.9	23.3	43.7	41.2	33.1	28.6	26.0	23.3	42.7	46.1
Completed High school	26.6	14.9	35.8	32.8	18.0	37.4	32.9	16.1	40.7	36.6	19.2	38.8
Prof. Qualification	14.5	18.9	16.5	18.2	14.0	5.7	15.3	22.3	17.4	21.6	13.0	4.7
Bachelor's	16.4	30.3	11.5	9.9	19.0	6.3	9.7	28.6	6.1	5.8	17.2	3.5
Master's/Doctoral	11.0	13.0	13.3	15.8	5.3	9.4	9.0	4.5	9.8	12.7	7.9	7.0

Table 5. Frequency distributions for media use, payment and media trust variables, 2015 (%).

	Legacy users						Born-digital users					
	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT
Media use and payment												
Frequency news use												
Less often once a week	2.4	2.2	2.4	3.8	2.2	1.7	3.8	4.3	1.8	3.7	3.6	4.9
Once a week to 6 times a week	6.5	6.6	7.3	7.9	6.4	4.8	8.3	11.8	7.8	4.7	8.7	9.9
Once a day to 5 times a day	30.1	25.2	23.9	31.4	40.3	29.6	37.7	38.2	34.1	37.4	44.9	34.2
6 times a day or more	61.0	66.0	66.4	56.8	51.0	63.9	50.2	45.7	56.2	54.2	42.8	51.0
Interest in news												
Extremely interested	34.6	31.6	37.5	25.9	35.6	40.2	24.5	19.4	26.7	23.1	29.9	23.5
Very interested	45.7	46.2	45.4	41.4	54.2	39.9	45.8	41.9	48.4	41.7	55.1	42.6
Somewhat interested	18.3	20.7	16.2	28.9	9.8	18.9	27.1	33.9	23.5	30.2	15.6	31.9
Not very interested	1.3	1.4	0.7	3.8	0.3	1.0	2.3	4.3	0.5	4.3	0.0	2.0
Not at all interested	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.0
Pay for digital news												
Yes	12.5	8.5	11.1	13.5	14.0	15.6	8.0	4.3	5.6	9.6	10.2	8.4
No	87.5	91.5	88.9	86.5	86.0	84.4	92.0	95.7	94.4	90.4	89.8	91.6
Media trust												
I can trust media												
Strongly disagree	4.6	3.9	5.0	4.9	5.6	3.8	5.5	7.0	1.8	5.9	6.9	5.5
Tend to disagree	20.8	20.8	12.2	19.5	27.6	22.3	21.0	21.5	8.3	23.4	27.5	21.4
Neither agree nor disagree	29.9	23.5	23.3	34.4	33.1	36.3	32.5	30.6	23.0	33.0	31.5	39.7
Tend to agree	40.4	48.1	49.3	38.8	31.4	34.6	37.3	39.2	57.6	34.3	31.9	30.7
Strongly agree	4.3	3.8	10.1	2.4	2.3	3.0	3.6	1.6	9.2	3.4	2.2	2.6
I can trust my own media												
Strongly disagree	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.8	3.8	2.5	2.6	2.2	0.9	3.1	4.3	2.0
Tend to disagree	15.2	12.2	7.4	13.7	24.4	17.1	15.5	17.2	6.0	17.1	19.2	16.2
Neither agree nor disagree	24.8	18.6	22.0	29.4	27.0	28.8	28.6	24.2	23.0	31.8	25.7	33.6
Tend to agree	50.7	58.9	53.9	50.1	42.1	48.1	48.1	51.6	57.1	43.6	47.1	45.5
Strongly agree	6.4	7.7	14.1	4.1	2.6	3.5	5.2	4.8	12.9	4.4	3.6	2.6

Finally, the analysis of the groups' media trust perception (RQ4) does not provide a clear conclusion. Although both types of readers show significant differences in 2015 ($U = 3453343$, $p = 0.027$) and 2019 ($U = 3341165$, $p = 0.039$) and those who use more legacy brands than digital-born media show higher media trust (44% of legacy respondents usually trust on news versus 40% of native users in 2015; 40% and 37% in 2019, respectively; see Tables 5 and 6), there are some differences in the five countries analysed. In 2015, the data show no significant differences between the two types of users in Spain ($U = 159969$, $p = 0.803$), Italy ($U = 188917$, $p = 0.223$), and France ($U = 119280$, $p = 0.161$). However, the similarity in the Spanish and Italian audience is around the distrust on media, while in France is around trust. As Table 5 shows, only a third of Spanish and Italian respondents usually trust the news, in contrast with 41% of the French users. That is, distrust is widespread in Spain and Italy in 2015, regardless of the type of media outlet, while in France, trust is the common ground for both groups.

Five years later (see Table 6), there are no differences between the two types of readers in France ($U = 125871$, $p = 0.966$), Germany ($U = 140053$, $p = 0.063$), and Italy ($U = 137063$, $p = 0.181$). In this case, French users coincide in their media distrust, regardless of the kind of outlet (only a quarter of French respondents usually trust media), while in Germany and Italy it is the opposite.

Additionally, we found no evidence of the third person effect (Davison, 1983; Perloff, 2009) in the research. The differences between groups in all countries (except Spain) are identical in 2015 ($U = 3463762$, $p = 0.037$) and 2019 ($U = 3315316$, $p = 0.011$) when users were asked about the trust they have in the news that they usually read.

6. Conclusion

The data confirms that, although the online news market continues to be dominated by legacy brands (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012) and the most popular sites are those

Table 6. Frequency distributions for media use, payment and media trust variables, 2019 (%).

	Legacy users						Born-digital users					
	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT	Total	UK	GER	FR	SP	IT
Media use and payment												
Frequency news use												
Less often once a week	0.7	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.5	1.6	3.6	1.6	2.1	0.4	1.6
Once a week to 6 times a week	7.5	7.7	8.3	7.9	7.3	6.5	9.4	14.3	8.7	9.2	9.3	8.7
Once a day to 5 times a day	64.0	62.3	61.0	66.5	69.1	61.3	71.6	67.9	71.4	74.0	78.5	64.2
6 times a day or more	27.8	28.9	30.2	25.1	22.8	31.6	17.3	14.3	18.3	14.7	11.8	25.6
Interest in news												
Extremely interested	30.7	32.8	34.6	20.8	30.9	31.7	21.7	19.6	26.8	12.4	24.3	24.3
Very interested	43.0	41.3	43.7	41.1	50.9	37.5	40.0	32.1	41.5	35.7	54.0	33.3
Somewhat interested	23.5	23.7	18.8	32.4	16.1	28.5	33.1	37.5	25.8	47.4	20.9	35.3
Not very interested	2.4	1.9	2.0	4.5	1.8	2.3	4.3	8.9	4.9	3.8	0.8	5.5
Not at all interested	0.5	0.2	1.0	1.2	0.3	0.1	0.9	1.8	0.9	0.7		1.6
Pay for digital news												
Yes	13.0	12.1	13.6	15.1	13.2	11.8	7.3	4.6	4.4	9.8	8.0	8.9
No	87.0	87.9	86.4	84.9	86.8	88.2	92.7	95.4	95.6	90.2	92.0	91.1
Media trust												
I can trust media												
Strongly disagree	9.1	7.9	6.7	18.4	9.6	5.5	10.3	9.7	6.7	16.4	14.2	4.3
Tend to disagree	22.1	25.8	19.2	29.4	20.6	16.9	22.8	33.6	12.2	32.2	23.3	20.2
Neither agree nor disagree	27.8	25.0	27.8	27.4	24.3	35.1	29.3	23.9	29.1	27.7	24.2	38.5
Tend to agree	36.1	38.2	39.1	23.1	38.1	38.1	33.4	31.0	47.1	22.3	29.2	33.9
Strongly agree	4.8	3.1	7.3	1.7	7.4	4.4	4.2	1.8	4.9	1.4	9.2	3.1
I can trust my own media												
Strongly disagree	4.9	4.2	2.1	9.1	6.3	3.8	5.0	7.1	4.3	6.8	6.3	1.9
Tend to disagree	16.4	17.7	11.2	20.7	18.7	14.0	19.0	31.3	8.3	23.6	24.7	16.7
Neither agree nor disagree	26.7	23.9	24.5	30.4	24.5	31.6	27.9	18.8	21.7	34.2	25.9	34.5
Tend to agree	44.8	49.0	50.7	35.8	40.9	45.3	41.8	42.0	58.4	31.8	31.4	41.5
Strongly agree	7.2	5.3	11.6	3.9	9.7	5.4	6.3	0.9	7.3	3.4	11.7	5.4

of major news organisations (McDowell, 2011), digital-born media have become part of the media ecosystem in all the countries analysed. This article confirms the divergence between legacy media users and native users. By and large, legacy users tend to be male and with higher income and education levels than native users (RQ1). However, cross-national data are not homogeneous in all countries.

It is interesting to note that the two groups of users differ more when journalistic variables are analysed (RQ2 and RQ3). In all countries (except France in both years), legacy brands audiences show greater interest, more news consumption, and more willingness to pay for digital news than the digital-born users.

In relation to media trust, data about the existence (or not) of differences between the two groups are less clear (RQ4). Global data shows significant differences in 2015 and 2019, and those who use more legacy brand than digital-born outlets are more likely to trust the news. In that sense, media scepticism is more widespread among native users.

Finally, the longitudinal analysis shows that in 2019, the percentage of very interested and heavy users decreased in both groups from 2015, although more intensely among native users. Additionally, trust in news also declined in 2019 in both types of users, especially among digital-born outlet readers (from 40.9% to 37.6%).

This data could demonstrate the strength of legacy brands, and its ability to get and keep loyal customers. As a whole, all the indicators analysed (interest, reading frequency, payment for news, and trust) are more positive to legacy media. And when they decreased in 2019, they did with less intensity than the native ones, widening the gap between the two groups. From a managerial viewpoint, legacy brands have three strong competitive advantages over digital-born media. Firstly, they enjoy a better differentiation in relation to competitors, not only in sociodemographic terms. Secondly, legacy media users show a higher engagement and tendency to loyalty to their brands. Thirdly, this engagement drives to a higher desire to continue buying the same brand, at least

in a higher percentage than native users (Chan-Olmsted, 2011). Any global news branding strategy should be based on these ideas, as brand recognition constitute the baseline from which to get and keep loyal customers. By far, this conclusion does not underestimate the role that digital-born outlets could play in the media landscape. Even if legacy media organisations succeed in moving readers towards paywalls, free alternatives are likely to remain in news markets (Sjøvaag, 2016).

Although a complete review of the factors contributing to media trust is beyond the scope of this study, a deeper look at this variable is necessary. Taken as a whole, the data shows the existence of significant differences among legacy users and native users in both years, as the former are more likely to rely more on news than the latter. This is not surprising, as native media were born in many cases as an alternative to legacy options, perceived as unreliable, mostly by younger people, as confirmed in previous studies (Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, 2005). Brand reputation could be a crucial factor in the trust transfer process from traditional media outlets to digital ones. Those who read more legacy media trust more in news, no matter the channel (traditional or digital) used. This is an additional competitive advantage for legacy brands, and any media brand extension strategy should be based on this idea.

However, the analysis by countries suggests a need for deeper research on other factors (like national media systems or institutional media trust) that could explain better why France and Italy there are no significant differences between the two groups in 2015 and 2019; why native users in Germany show greater confidence in the news than legacy users in both years; or why, when institutional trust in media is widespread (such as in France in 2015 or Germany in 2019), there are no differences between legacy and native users. The relevance of these studies could improve the strategies for the media to follow in order to avoid the dilution of the differential value of legacy brands.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Business Model Innovation in News Media: Fostering New Relationships to Stimulate Support from Readers

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Abstract
Customer relationships are an important pillar of a business model (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). For years, though, news media has not invested much effort into nurturing rich connections with their consumers and, consequently, neglected the promotion of a participatory culture that could bring benefits for all involved (Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010; Rosen, 2006). Vanishing advertising revenue and changing habits of news consumption on the Internet create a situation for changing that situation—especially when considering journalism as a service (Jarvis, 2014). Therefore, this article employs multiple case-study research to analyze and compare how four digital news natives from different countries (*The Correspondent* from the Netherlands, *eldiario.es* from Spain, *Mediapart* from France, and the Brazilian branch of *The Intercept*) are creating more meaningful connections with their audiences in order to sustain their businesses. We found out that all cases resort in varying degrees to the ideology of journalism, personification, transparency, impactful content, and community as motivations to attract members, while at the same time refraining from advertising becomes a guarantee of independence. Social media is losing ground, as companies use their own platforms and channels, such as emails, to develop routines that take member participation into account in different levels—from intermediate to maximal—though customization is still limited. The challenge for online-born news companies is to manage so many variables while taking into consideration feedback from their sustainable base of members.

Keywords
business models; customer relationships; digital journalism; entrepreneurial journalism; innovation; news media; revenue sources

Issue
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1. Introduction

Advertisers spent around US$ 330 billion on digital inventory in 2019, an increase of 17,6% in comparison to the previous year. Those numbers reflect a growing trend of the 2010s: The online advertising market exceeding television and print in several of the most important markets (Enberg, 2019). However, for news publishers, reaching much larger audiences than in the past does not exactly mean acquiring more financial gains. Hence, most of the media nowadays is looking at diversifying with, and regaining control over, other revenue sources—especially ones derived from readers (Rashidian, Tsiveriotis, & Brown, 2019).

Online news consumption, though, made it more difficult for publishers to control the value chain of content production and distribution (van der Wurff, 2012). People can now choose to get the information they want from multiple sources, many of which are free. Therefore, the willingness to pay for news content in most countries is still low (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). In this sense, simply erecting paywalls

around content may work for some well-established brands, but probably not for online-born news media, which need to innovate and develop relationships that create value for these readers in order to reach sustainability (Jarvis, 2014).

Eldiario.es (Spain), *The Correspondent* (Netherlands), *The Intercept Brasil* and *Mediapart* (France), all outlets that originated online and which we will study in this article, have proven themselves successful in using subscription/membership-based models to sustain their journalistic initiatives in a scenario where the traditional business strategies of journalism companies are often leading to difficulties. Thus, this research intends to answer: 'How are these news organizations developing new forms of relationships with readers in order to acquire sustainable revenues?'

To do so, we discuss what customer relationships are and the importance of business models for publishers, and what types of relationships arise between the consumer–audience and news companies. We also note manners used to attract the audience to digital news natives and reasons that incite the public to contribute to the journalistic enterprise.

2. Theoretical Framework

Journalism has played a vital role in society since the 19th century, when seeking information and reporting it to the public became its primary obligation (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), but the process of accelerated change driven by technology transformed the way it is produced, distributed, and used. Although we see the emergence of new tools and practices, we assume that there are non-negotiable and fundamental values that constitute the ideology of the profession, such as truth and accuracy, and, especially, a commitment to the public (Dahlgren, 2010; Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014)—which also happens to be their consumer audience.

The newspaper industry is at a crossroads when it comes to reader engagement and interactive online platforms. While journalism remains surrounded by a professional ideology (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), media outlets are commercial enterprises that survive by attracting an audience. News companies are faced with challenges that derive from the failing of the traditional business model of the profession and an economic motivation for newspapers to move to the web. Understanding how to reach audiences, how to keep them, and how to thread each piece of journalism through a complex maze of different sites and applications has fundamentally changed the way newsrooms operate (Dahlgren, 2010; Hayes et al., 2007). Faced with changing media use, media companies need to innovate to remain profitable (McCluskey & Hmielowski, 2011).

From a management perspective, customer relationships are essential to the value creation side of a business model: by developing them, companies are able to make a connection between their value propositions and their customer segments—and, eventually, acquire revenue from it (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Due to its essence of public interest and importance to people's exercise of citizenship, Jarvis (2014) suggests journalism should also be understood as a service. In this sense, news companies would be able to solve real information needs for their readers and start developing closer relationships with them in order to keep improving the service—and, consequently, find commercial opportunities derived from this connection. This approach to journalism can obviously generate criticism. It may be considered excessively attached to commercial interests or overly utilitarian, turning journalists into mere producers of content to satisfy people's basic interests—or curiosity—instead of contributing to needed civic discussions.

We understand there is a duality to the idea of journalism as a service. Beyond the notion of journalism as a public service (the function of providing the audience with credible information), journalism gained commercial value in the 19th century, with the institutionalization of journalistic culture, and the formation of a market for readers (Chalaby, 1996). At the same time, it also became a paid service provided by journalists to a consumer public. According to Carlson (2016), journalism varies constantly and continuously, taking many forms even simultaneously, depending on geographic and contextual factors, and is always subject to a set of social relationships and a dispute of forces from different fields.

In that sense, even imbued with a commercial logic, media companies can continue to fulfill their duty to the public with reliable information and, why not, be perceived as service providers to a consumer audience. As such, Skaggs and Youndt (2004) state that service companies keep basically three types of relationships with their customers: 1) 'Contact,' related to the amount of interaction a business keeps with the consumer; 2) 'co-production,' which refers to the smaller or bigger amount of effort—even creative—a customer should make in the production of the service; and 3) 'customization,' explained by the extent a company is able to personalize the offer for individual customers—by collecting, processing and analyzing data about their habits.

Journalism Studies usually gathers contact and co-production in a single set of practices labeled as 'participatory journalism.' Participation in the process of news making is not new, but it became a widespread practice with the emergence of the Internet and social media (Singer, 2011). This situation represented a change in the power balance of news production and distribution since the audience became able not only to pitch news professionals with ideas and share their work on social media, but also question their points of view and even produce and disseminate their own news content (Rosen, 2006).

Traditional publishers, still dealing with the transition from print to digital, tend to struggle with this new reality (Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010). Peters and Witschge (2015) point out that even outlets that employ a dis-

course of participation, in fact, usually offer limited space for it. According to the authors, news organizations, in general, understand participatory journalism only as an opportunity to derive economic benefits while journalists still maintain a far higher hierarchical level on the relationship, keeping most of the control over the editorial processes. Therefore, participation generally tends to be minimal despite discourses of democratization and inclusivity (Table 1).

This situation opens room for digital news natives differentiation, which can be reached by the development of more meaningful and inclusive relationships, based on news consumers online habits, increasingly focused on deeper connections and greater exchange of information through person-to-person (journalist-to-reader) interaction (Ingram, 2014). Even though Ingram's (2014) argument is based on anecdotal evidence, it does demonstrate that digital native news outlets have been more successful in implementing and seeing through participatory initiatives, whilst legacy news media struggle to sustain manners of public participation, as Porlezza (2019) shows.

In this sense, outlets are urged to adopt what Quamby, Goligoski, and Jenkins (2019) call 'memberful routines':

> Normal ways of operating that incorporate members and produce value for a news organization, which is how they got to be routines in the first place. A simple example would be a database of members and their expertise that is routinely tapped to provide technical proofreading of articles and investigations. It might take time, but it also adds value. The value includes the added 'stickiness' of the member who is consulted about things that member knows a lot about. (p. 3)

These routines can have several formats: simple tools enabling members to vote on subjects of their interest, moderated comments sections, callouts where publishers ask for their expertise or interest on specific themes, structured surveys, real work with data shared that can be paid, participation on editorial and training events, etc. Interaction can work through different channels, such as the publishers' owned platforms, social media (Facebook Messenger and Groups are popular tools for that), emails—where different versions of newsletters can be tailored according to the interests and expertise of members subscribed—and even offline events and editorial meetings (Quamby et al., 2019). Participation is possible in the four steps of newsrooms' workflow: 1) planning; 2) research and reporting; 3) editing and fact-checking; and 4) post-publication.

In order to develop this approach in journalism, there is a need to present attractive value propositions to users—or 'member motivations,' as Quamby et al. (2019) prefer to call them. The authors list mainly six reasons for readers to support news organizations: 1) learning something new; 2) contributing with expertise; 3) having a say and being heard; 4) finding out about the outlet's processes (transparency); 5) showing love for a mission that matters; and 6) being part of a community. Wagemans, Witschge, and Deuze (2016) mention that resorting to the ideology of traditional journalistic values can also be a compelling value proposition in times when traditional media faces a crisis of trust. A professional ideology is a set of principles shared by a group of people (Deuze, 2005). The ideology of journalism is supposedly formed by five main values: 1) Journalists provide a public service; 2) objectivity is essential and its consequence is credibility; 3) they are independent; 4) they have a sense of immediacy; and 5) they possess a sense of ethics and legitimacy (Deuze, 2005). We should note that we look at objectivity not as a lack of opinion, but as it relates to journalism's duty to truth, as the profession remains a space for reliable and credible news. Objectivity can be thought then as the balance of accuracy, which indicates the loyalty to what is factually indisputable, and fairness, that represents the pluralism of voices (Dahlgren, 2010).

Table 1. Scope and degree of participation.

Scope of participation	Minimal	→	Maximal
Visibility and presence of audience	As respondents to certain items only	As authors of texts in designated areas	As structural contributors throughout the platform
Hierarchical level of interaction	Reply-based audience response (i.e., polls), detached from journalistic interaction	Interactions-based with other audience members and/or journalists, limited impact on production (i.e., audience photos, tweets for breaking news)	Dialogue and consultation-based input in news production at an editorial level
Stage of production	Post-hoc, after news is presented as finished product	Real-time, during the (on-going) creation of a story	During the planning stages to co-design the news agenda, news angles and stories

Source: Peters and Witschge (2015).

Wagemans et al. (2016) also call attention to a certain level of personification that can be employed by an outlet in order to attract support. It means news companies expressly take advantage of the reputation of its founders in order to convince readers to become members or subscribers.

Memberful routines and member motivations work not only as practices but as a philosophy digital news natives should adopt to improve the relationships with their readers—without a real commitment from the newsrooms, results tend to be less effective (Quamby et al., 2019). They can be employed basically by any publisher looking for reader revenue, either through memberships (when the publisher keeps the content free but asks for a donation from readers that can support their initiative), subscriptions (when content can only be accessed by paying subscribers), or other innovative models.

It is worth noting that the practices that involve public participation—especially contact—often go beyond journalism itself and can be performed, for example, with marketing intentions. Carlson (2016) observes that what he calls 'metajournalistic discourse' is not unusual and frequently works as a form of response from journalists to contention from forces outside the field:

> A persistent thread (of research) shows how, in certain moments, journalists pivot from their role as producers of media discourse to become its object as well….In connecting public discourse with the establishment of cultural meaning surrounding news, they show the need to look beyond news practices to explain journalism's cultural authority. (p. 4)

In this sense, these public expressions reflect on the relationships news companies and journalists have with their audiences and other forces that negotiate the boundaries of journalism with them, such as government officials, historians, and educators, among others:

> Boundaries are powerful social constructions that affect the distribution of resources as well as the allotment of 'epistemic authority'….Actors construct boundaries through metajournalistic discourse either directly through explicit categorization or implicitly through embedded assumptions in talk about journalism. (Carlson, 2016, p. 12)

Even though journalists can be considered the original proponents of these boundaries, they have no control over the result of this negotiation—the legitimation of their epistemic authority role is granted by their ability of convincing the other actors about the legitimate knowledge derived from the news they produce (Carlson, 2016). Once more, the importance of transparency is highlighted and reinforced within the process of establishing the boundaries of journalism and gaining legitimacy ahead of the other actors in this dispute. This value has not been contemplated by classic theory on the values of the profession and its adoption is not widely spread among legacy news outlets, while digital news natives are more open to it since their foundations—what exposes a clear advantage from them in establishing more hybrid forms of journalism and, consequently, closer relationships with their audiences (Hayes et al., 2007).

3. Methodology

This research is based on case studies of four digital news native companies from four different countries. *The Correspondent* is the English version of *De Correspondent*, created in the Netherlands in 2013 as "an antidote to the daily news grind" (*The Correspondent*, n.d.). The Dutch version raised more than €1 million in a crowdfunding round that turned 18,000 supporters into the first subscribers of the organization. In 2018, they launched another crowdfunding campaign that earned US$ 2.6 million from 45,888 people at more than 130 countries in order to expand globally—which happened by the end of September 2019 (Pfauth, 2018). *Eldiario.es*, from Spain, was founded in 2012 by journalist Ignacio Escolar, former director of *Público*, together with professionals that had already worked with him. The founder and director is the main shareholder of the company, which is not attached to any big editorial group—70% of its capital is formed by people from its newsroom. The outlet promotes advertising and counts on the support of members to "keep its independence" (*eldiario.es*, n.d.-a). *The Intercept Brasil* was funded in mid-2016 during the process of impeachment of the country's former president Dilma Rousseff. It was an opportunity found by co-founder and editor Glenn Greenwald—a Pulitzer Prize winner in 2014 for the revelation of National Security Agency's mass secret surveillance, who has lived in Brazil for a long time—to promote its recently created publication, originally funded by First Look Media, a philanthropic organization launched by Pierre Omidyar, the founder and chairman of eBay (*The Intercept Brasil*, n.d.-a). *Mediapart* is a French digital newspaper started by four former journalists of *Le Monde* and two technology specialists who raised a personal starting capital of €1.325 million and other €1.614 million from investors and a society of friends to launch in 2007—later, it received further investments (Plenel, 2008a). In October 2019, the company bought back all its shares and became a non-profit organization that receives and manages funds from almost 170,000 subscribers (Plenel, 2019).

First, we carried out a comprehensive documental and bibliographical research that entailed data from press releases, email newsletters, corporate reports, and articles published on the platforms owned by the outlets and also by specialized media. For example, we looked at news articles from *The Correspondent*'s website "The Problem with Real News, and What We Can Do about It" (Wijnberg, 2019), "A Peek at the Correspondent's Launch Budget" (Anyangwe & Pfauth, 2019) and "My Mission

Table 2. Selection of cases.

Publisher	Country	Business model	Number of members *	Membership fee	Gross annual revenue
The Correspondent	Netherlands	Subscriptions (hard paywall)	50,000	Choose what you pay	US$ 2.6 million (2019)
eldiario.es	Spain	Advertising (60%), memberships (38%) and events (2%)	35,000	€7 a month or €60 a year	€6.6 million (2019)
The Intercept Brasil	Brazil	Philanthropic foundation and memberships	9,000	€5,4 to €216 a month	Non-disclosed
Mediapart	France	Subscriptions (hard paywall)	170,000	€5 to €15 a month or €50 to €150 a year	€13.8 million (2018)

Note: * Approximate numbers based on company reports and/or interviews.

as Your Conversation Editor" (Shabbir, 2019), as well as their founder Rob Wijnberg's blog on *Medium*, that has several posts which debate policies and practices behind the news enterprise (Wijnberg, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d).

Several sources were important for analyzing *eldiario.es*' relationships with readers and members. Founder and director Ignacio Escolar owns a blog where he publishes every six months a comprehensive report on the financial figures of the company (Escolar, 2019a, 2019b). The directors of the company have also given several interviews to blogs and specialized media (Nafría, 2018; SuscribeME suscripciones digitales, 2019), and *eldiario.es* also has a blog focused strictly on members—which highlights benefits such as lower prices for cultural events and debates with journalists from their newsroom (*eldiario.es*, n.d.-b).

We also investigated documents published by *Mediapart* director Edwy Plenel that describe the project of the enterprise (Plenel, 2007), their stance on free press (Plenel, 2008b), and the importance of independence for their organization (Plenel, 2008a); and looked at interviews he granted in which he spoke about the company, its purpose, and ideology (Grasser, 2019; Martinez, 2018; Rhian & Foreau, 2019). Interestingly, email newsletters were some of the main sources of information for this research for the case of *The Intercept Brasil*. From November 5th, 2019, when we first subscribed to it, until December 15th, 2019, the day we submitted this article, they sent us 16 emails. The company has a strategy of frequently sending them signed by one of their journalists—the four examples signed by Leandro Demori, their executive editor, and the one signed by Marianna Araújo, their director of communication were of particular interest to this research (Supplementary File, Annex 1), since they show how the company employs metajournalistic discourse in order to directly address members and potential ones in order to present their views on their professional role.

In order to collect further information about the selected cases, we also looked at academic articles that focused on our studied cases, or that mentioned them as examples of journalistic practices (Canu & Datchary, 2010; Guerrero, 2017; Masurier, 2015; Newman, Levy, & Nielsen, 2015; Picard, 2014; Quamby et al., 2019; Thurman & Myllylahti, 2009; Wagemans et al., 2016).

Following that, we ran a continuous and systematic platform observation between October 28th and November 3rd, 2019, on the companies' websites, mobile applications (in the case of *eldiario.es* and *Mediapart*), and main social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) in order to identify traces of the memberful routines mentioned by Quamby et al. (2019) and the metajournalistic discourse theory described by Carlson (2016). Every day during that week, we opened the article of the main headline of the website and apps of the publishers as well as other articles that could demonstrate a clear interest for membership reasons—for instance, announcements of new corporate reports or events made available for members.

Both during the desk and platform research, we performed a content analysis of the collected material in order to find answers or at least hints for a set of 12 questions related to our theoretical framework (Supplementary File, Annex 3). Since the amount of material analyzed was comprehensive, this process already provided us with considerable insight into the strategies employed by the selected publications to maintain sustainable relationships with their public.

We still reached out to every outlet with requests for complementary information. A semi-structured questionnaire with around 10 questions (Supplementary File, Annex 2) was applied during interviews that lasted more than 40 minutes with María Ramírez, director of strategy at *eldiario.es* (via Skype); Marianna Araújo, communication director at *The Intercept Brasil* (via Google Meet); and Livia Garrigue, manager of Le Club, and Ana Ferrer, community manager at *Mediapart* (they received us per-

sonally in Paris). Carmen Schaack, member support manager at *The Correspondent*, preferred to answer our questions via email.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Member Motivations

All of our cases resort, in varying degrees, to the 'ideology of journalism' as a resource to attract members. *Mediapart* and *eldiario.es* are the ones who employ a more classical approach to it. Both cases clearly mention in their introductory pages most of the principles that describe this ideology, such as independence, sense of ethics, and the defense of democracy. *Eldiario.es* interestingly uses the slogan "*periodismo a pesar de todo*" ("journalism, despite of everything," authors' translation), which summarizes its value proposition for readers: a return to the profession's values as a way of defending its importance in times of lack of credibility and increasing pressure from political powers (*eldiario.es*, n.d.-a). *Mediapart* was created with the goal of practicing independent and participative journalism (*Mediapart*, n.d.): They are committed to the concept of the profession as public service (Plenel, 2007; Rhian & Foreau, 2019). Their commitment to their readers is paralleled to the importance they give to their journalistic independence, proven by one of their slogans, which reads "only our readers can buy us." In the French media market, being a member-based company is how they innovate; not reimagining journalism, but returning to the traditional ideology of the profession, with values such as truth-telling, editorial autonomy, and independence (Wagemans et al., 2016).

The Correspondent and *The Intercept Brasil* attempt to show readers that they keep the main values of the profession while at the same time updating others. The Dutch publisher steps away from hard news and into slow journalism, rejecting the daily news cycle and having a different approach to immediacy, yet still promising relevant information for the public, claiming to respect what the audience wants from journalism today (Wijnberg, 2019). The Brazilian outlet, on the other hand, seeks to hold the powerful accountable through fearless and combative journalism with deep investigations and relentless analyses—a discourse that resonates with a purist ideology of the profession (*The Intercept Brasil*, n.d.-a). However, this is put in practice through a certain level of militancy and a clear political stance, which is clear in the email newsletters collected (Supplementary File, Annex 1) and admitted by the company's director of communication in her interview to us: "If there is no reader to buy in this ideology, buy your brand, ultimately (buy in) the whole combo Intercept, it is difficult to deal with the question of sustainability" (personal communication).

Since the values of the profession are so important for the cases analyzed, it is not surprising that most of them also use 'personification' as a selling point of their initiatives. *Eldiario.es*' founder and director, Ignacio Escolar, is personally in charge of publishing the company's reports to members—and, consequently, asking for more support—as well as answering their comments on these occasions (Escolar, 2019b). Director of strategy María Ramírez states that he also sends personal emails to each person that decides to quit their membership: "He's very present on TV and everything, he is a public figure. Definitely that helps….Definitely he is a big asset for the paper," says Ramírez (personal communication). A person with similar functions at *Mediapart* is Edwy Plenel, the organization's most recognized founder. He became the face and voice of the company, advocating for a return to serious and committed journalism in France, selling and defending *Mediapart*'s ideology and brand of investigative journalism in the media market to its fellow news outlets, to academia and to the public itself (Grasser, 2019; Martinez, 2018; Rhian & Foreau, 2019).

Glenn Greenwald's popularity has certainly increased in 2019 after *The Intercept Brasil* received from a whistleblower the files of conversations that prosecutors of Operation Car Wash exchanged with judge Sergio Moro before the condemnation of former Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in a corruption case—he participated on several TV and radio programs to answer questions about the subject: "Glenn was a relevant public figure for the debate of world politics even before *The Intercept Brasil* existed. So, this is unstoppable….It is natural that, in the search for references, the people associate the company to him," says Marianna Araújo (personal communication). *Correspondent*'s founder Rob Wijnberg had made a name for himself in Dutch journalism before deciding to start the company, having been the youngest editor in chief of a national daily paper in Europe (Wallach, 2018). The founding of the organization in 2013 earned him the title of Journalist of the Year by the Dutch Association for Journalists (Wallach, 2018), and he has been vocal about his views of the profession (Medium, n.d.)

'Transparency' specifies the effort of making visible the production process of news as well as its limitations, and providing the public, which in membership sites is an essential part of the sustainability of the enterprise, with the behind the scenes of the company—how their money is spent, what resources journalists use, etc. In all of these accounts, transparency remains an essential value of journalism (Dahlgren, 2010), sustaining the company as it becomes an element to attract the audience and inspire their trust in the outlet (Hayes et al., 2007). Interestingly, the European cases from our sample not only try to keep members aware of their journalistic processes, but also periodically disclose numbers related to their financial sustainability—a behavior that apparently also collaborates in the process of enhancing their credibility, and even helps with acquiring new members, depending on the discourse used to explore the figures: "It makes current members proud and more involved, some-

times they even raise their membership monthly fee. It is one of the key messages from eldiario.es since the very beginning," explains Ramírez (personal communication).

The Intercept Brasil is the only case of the sample that still does not disclose their whole financial figures—the number of people who became members and the amount collected is shown in a third-party website where the memberships are paid (Catarse, n.d.), but those numbers count even people who actually could not effectuate the payment due to any problem and they are not compared to the whole budget of the company. Director of communication, Araújo, alleges that they are already studying ways to make more transparent reports available to readers.

Three out of the four cases admitted that 'impactful content' has a direct relation to the growth of their base of members. Investigative journalism and the consequent release of exclusive news stories—the famous and traditional 'journalistic scoop'—brings notoriety to news outlets and proves to be a way to draw in new members. With over ten years in the French media market, *Mediapart* has broken some of France's biggest scandals involving politicians, such as the investigation that claimed Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi gave Nicolas Sarkozy €50 million for the 2007 presidential campaign (Willsher, 2018). At *eldiario.es*, in 2018, they published a series of investigative reports accusing the former president of the Madrid community, Cristina Cifuentes, of receiving a diploma in the Master in Autonomous Law at the Rey Juan Carlos University without participating in classes or receiving approval in some disciplines (Ejerique, 2018). The repercussion of the case forced her to resign and increased *eldiario.es*' base of members from 22,296 to 34,028 (growth of 52,6%) in a single year (Escolar, 2019a). Something similar happened with *The Intercept Brasil* in 2019, during the abovementioned case in which the judge and prosecutors combined measures during the lawsuits of the largest anti-corruption operation in the history of the country. Before the series of reports, they were raising around R$ 50,000 per month, an amount that was increased to around R$ 250,000 (a growth of basically 500%) by the end of November, according to the communication director of the company, who points out, though, that content was only the trigger for that growth:

> *The Intercept Brasil* was not part of the public conversation of the country because it was too small. Those stories allow the broader audience to know our work. This is one point. *The Intercept Brasil* also makes the usage of a language that allows greater proximity to the reader. We work a lot on that, and I think that was crucial for the success of our campaigns. (personal communication)

That sums up 'community,' a value proposition employed differently by all cases. *The Correspondent* and *The Intercept Brasil* consider themselves as 'movements' instead of normal news outlets because they count on members' support to spread their word and pressure authorities for 'change' (Supplementary File, Annex 1), while *eldiario.es* and *Mediapart* prefer to keep a more sober approach and maybe a less passionate relationship with their members, as we derive from interviews.

4.2. Channels

All of our cases make available for members or subscribers a space for participation in their 'owned platforms.' This space varies from a simple section for comments (all of them have it), to a whole section dedicated to content completely provided by members, which is the case of *Mediapart*'s Le Club. *Eldiario.es* provides spaces where members can vote on polls and report mistakes to be corrected by their journalists in the articles.

'Emails' are a very popular channel for interaction with members as well. *Eldiario.es* and *The Intercept Brasil* make an email address available for readers to share information that can lead to news coverage on their websites (*eldiario.es*, n.d.-c; *The Intercept Brasil*, n.d.-b). *The Correspondent* also calls out for their members to contribute with stories and opinions, as well as criticism and suggestions via email, divulging the contact for their correspondents and for their public liaisons (Shabbir, 2019). *Mediapart* does not encourage collaboration for stories via email, but that is because they provide Le Club. Publishers seem more excited, though, by the engagement their email newsletters can produce. Beyond simple content distribution, they are using them in order to strengthen ties with members and reinforce their importance for the business models adopted. *The Correspondent* and *The Intercept Brasil*, for example, frequently employ them to start conversations with their members from the content they already published or to help them prepare upcoming news pieces.

Publishers still rely on 'social media' to reach readers, but third-party digital platforms are rarely a place of meaningful interaction beyond simply distribution. *The Correspondent* attempts to be an exception to that. They aim for quality over quantity when it comes to publishing content on their social media profiles, ensuring they can interact with the public in their posts. On Facebook and Instagram, we noted they published one or two stories a day and they made an effort to prompt public contribution in their comment sections, with a subsequent attempt to answer comments, engaging with their audience on all channels. On Twitter, while they produced more content tweeting links to their main stories of the day, they still tried to recognize public interaction with their profile, by liking audience tweets. It is a notable effort because they use social media not only as a form to distribute content and reach a larger audience, but to actually engage with the public. *The Intercept Brasil* holds frequent live streams on Instagram where their main journalists can talk about their last articles and answer questions from the audience. The non-profit or-

ganization also keeps a private group on Facebook only for paying members where they try to make their journalists become conversation leaders by posting new content, making and answering questions, etc. The engagement, though, is limited and the company is still not satisfied with the results of this initiative.

The Correspondent, *eldiario.es*, and *Mediapart* hold 'offline events and editorial meetings' with members and non-members. The Dutch and Spanish publishers seem to be the ones who employ events as a more frequent channel, making their schedule available on owned platforms, social media and sending invites by email (*eldiario.es*, n.d.-b). According to Momkai, the design studio that helped *The Correspondent* to be launched, "empowering our community of members means bringing a digital concept into the physical world" (Momkai, n.d.).

4.3. Relationships

The channels cited above give a preview of the various forms of 'contact' and 'co-production' that are made available by the cases analyzed in this research for members or subscribers. The level of meaningful participation, though, varies significantly from case to case. In this sense, *The Correspondent* is considered to be the outlet from our sample that is more open to participation. They try to establish conversations in all channels they keep open for readers and attempt to profit from members' expertise basically in all steps of the workflow. *Eldiario.es* and *The Intercept Brasil* are less prone to accepting contributions during the two intermediary steps of the workflow, as María Ramírez explains:

> We are kind of skeptical about news outlets that make—or say they make—readers work like *The Correspondent* and all these examples. Because, in the end, readers appreciate when you are useful to them, but I'm not sure they appreciate when you are chasing them and making them work. And, actually, our experience is that tips could come from anyone. Scoops, that's why you need journalists, to find them, right? (personal communication)

Mediapart is the only case from our sample to keep a specific space for member contributions, as mentioned before. At Le Club, subscribers can submit complete articles that eventually may be headlined on a sidebar of the publisher's homepage—more frequently, though, they are kept only at the page of the club. On the one hand, this can be understood as a good practice since it reserves a permanent space for users to collaborate. In this sense, it means allowing participation in all the steps of the workflow. On the other hand, though, it is clear that *Mediapart* makes a distinction from professional journalism and participation. Hence, there are actually two workflows happening in parallel and members are not really being allowed to participate in the process led by journalists.

If we consider contact to be the most basic relationship news companies can keep with their readers and an initial form of participation, we can conceive all selected cases have already gone through this first level and reached the point where they have a co-production relationship with their members. Their levels of co-production, though, vary significantly. *Eldiario.es* and *The Intercept Brasil* keep co-production at an intermediate level, while *Mediapart* and *The Correspondent* employ it at a level closer to maximal, even though the French publisher practices a contradictory style of co-production, as explained above.

We consider that applying to practice the scope and the degree of participation scheme suggested by Peters and Witschge (2015) is very difficult due to its excess of normativeness. We found variations of intensity inside each degree that make it complicated to have objective definitions. For example, we could consider that the hierarchical level of interaction at *The Intercept Brasil* is maximal because they allow "dialogue and consultation-based input in news production at an editorial level" (Peters & Witschge, 2015, p. 26). Although, it is not clear that just by opening the channel they really take these consultations seriously into account when producing their content. It actually seemed more like a pro forma procedure than an effective collaboration.

'Customization' is actually a relationship that all selected cases can still improve. The highlight in this regard, once again, is *The Correspondent*, which allows members to follow specific journalists or collections of stories in a determined subject on the website, creating a personalized feed on a user's menu. One can also save their favorite stories and receive recommendations based on that choice. It is an interesting effort that uses the tools provided by digital media to create a modern website with features that can turn one's experience in their news site as personal as possible, which is aligned with their proposal of turning away from the general news cycle and embracing an innovative way to consume journalism, developing a relationship with the public based on their wants and needs. *Eldiario.es* allows users of its mobile application to follow subjects according to their interests. *The Intercept Brasil* and *Mediapart* do not provide any customization options on their platforms. Interestingly, though, all cases allow limited customization in their newsletters. In the case of *eldiario.es* and *Mediapart*, it is possible to actively select the emails a reader deserves to receive, while *The Correspondent* and *The Intercept* usually tailor their newsletters to readers' interests according to the subjects of previous ones they have already opened.

5. Conclusion

In this research, we discussed five valuable member motivations, four categories of channels and three variations of service relationships the selected cases employ in order to develop meaningful connections with their mem-

bers. This shows how complex it is for digital news natives to establish the so-called memberful routines cited by Quamby et al. (2019) and how varied they can be. Even successful cases show significant differences, constantly reassessing their choices and make changes that take into consideration their philosophies, professional views, available resources and particularities related to the market in which they are positioned.

Being member-based journalistic companies is part of the four selected cases' brands. It is representative not only of their business models, but also an indicator of how they view their journalistic mission and what journalism they propose. The role of advertisement—or lack thereof—is relevant for their relationships with the audience. Being 'ad free' is, overall, a member privilege and a form to secure independent journalism, as they can consider themselves accountable to their paying members and no one else; just as their subscribers enjoy a space where they are free to navigate without the intrusion of advertisements. Having no or limited ads becomes a selling point, not only for providing a clean navigation of their news sites but because it emboldens their commitment to news as public service and to the journalistic value of independence.

We should note that even though these four companies have been proving successful in keeping themselves afloat and conducting their brand of journalism through member support, sustainability remains challenging. They have to make a continuous effort in the management of a meaningful relationship with their members, as well as regularly attempting to capture new subscribers. It is not clear, though, that simply allowing more participation is the correct path for that. Every publisher has to find its own dose, according to the assessment of their consumers' needs. Sometimes it is maximal, sometimes it is a little less. Keeping a stable—or growing, if possible—base of members and frequently collecting their feedback through the various channels available seems to be the most important metrics.

It should be considered that even though our analysis of the news companies' relationship with their members took into account an extensive review of documents and bibliography pertaining to their strategies and history, as well as interviews with representatives from the organizations, our observation of their platforms and social networks was limited to a strict period of time. We recognize that a longer period of study of their presence online might have yielded more insights regarding how they establish relationships with members. We must also stress that our analysis is based on the point of view of the journalistic enterprises and not from their subscribers. We assume members legitimate them as they continually pay for their services and guarantee the sustainability of their businesses. Applying other methods, however, such as surveys, that consider the outlook of the members, would be a valuable path for future research to investigate their views on the relationships they establish and choose to maintain with news companies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

The Enduring Popularity of Legacy Journalism: An Analysis of Online Audience Data

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Abstract

As news publishers continue to lose subscribers and advertising revenue, journalism practitioners and researchers have looked to newcomers to the field for ideas of how to adapt and succeed in a much more saturated and unstable media environment. Many have specifically looked to digital native news organizations to understand the ways that journalism is attempting to reinvent itself for a media landscape that is very different from the previous one. Yet what often gets lost in this focus on the newest news organizations is the resilience of many of journalism's older ones. In this study, I analyze a year's worth of U.S.-based online news consumption data to show that, even in a media environment increasingly saturated with digital native news outlets, legacy news brands continue to comprise a majority of the most popular news sites. Drawing on audience studies literature, I argue that these findings likely reflect audience preferences for familiar, established brands, as well as structural advantages these brands maintain due to their size and capital. I conclude that the fate of digital news organizations is not just a question of their innovativeness or nimbleness. It is also a question of their ability to combat a combination of powerful, stubborn forces: the habits of the people they hope to reach, and the deep pockets of their competitors.

Keywords

audience studies; digital native news; journalism; legacy news; news consumption; news publishers

Issue

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1. Introduction

As news publishers continue to lose subscribers and advertising revenue, journalism practitioners and researchers have looked to newcomers to the field for ideas of how to adapt and succeed in a much more saturated and unstable media environment. Scholars study digital native news organizations to better understand the ways that journalism is attempting to reinvent itself for a very different media landscape than the previous one (Ferrucci, 2015, 2017; Nee, 2013). And industry stakeholders have pinned their hopes on digital native news publishers when it comes to solving the profession's most pressing problems. *BuzzFeed*, for example—known as one of the earliest and most successful digitally native news organizations—was described in 2015 as "the rare example of a news organization that changes the way the news industry works" and "the most influential news organization in America today" (LaFrance & Meyer, 2015). As *The Economist* put it: "Great expectations attended digital journalism outfits. Firms such as *BuzzFeed* and *Mashable* were the hip kids destined to conquer the internet" ("Digital news outlets," 2017).

Indeed, when *BuzzFeed* laid off about 200 people in January of 2019, the widespread surprise and disappointment illustrated just how invested many throughout the profession had become in the notion that these digital-first news brands represented the guiding light in journalism's future. "The news," wrote David Uberti (2019) in *Columbia Journalism Review*, "cut deepest into the digital imagination." If *BuzzFeed* couldn't overcome the news industry's challenges, the conventional wisdom

went, how did the rest of the profession stand a chance? As Farhad Manjoo (2019) put it in *The New York Times*: "Digital media needs a way to profitably serve the masses. If even *BuzzFeed* couldn't hack that, we are well and truly hosed.''

Implicit in the discourse that emphasizes the potential of digital native news outlets is the assumption that legacy news outlets are already anachronistic. While digital native news brands represent the promise of the future, legacy news brands—those that began in radio, television, or print—represent a traditional approach to journalism that grows more conspicuously outdated as news consumption becomes more of a digital affair. Even as legacy news brands continue to publish the news, they are perceived as the way journalism once was, while digital native news publishers—defined by their focus first and foremost on publishing for the internet—represent the way it eventually will be. Yet this framing overlooks an important truth about the news media environment that this study seeks to bring to the fore: Legacy news publishers—not the digital natives—continue to attract the bulk of audience attention. In short, what gets lost in this focus on journalism's newest publishers is the resilience of many older ones.

In this study I analyze a year's worth of U.S.-based online news consumption data to show that, even in a media environment increasingly saturated with digital native news outlets, legacy news brands continue to comprise a majority of the most popular news sites. While a handful of digital native news organizations have broken through, most of those that continue to attract the largest number of readers comprise print, broadcast, and public radio brands, many of which were founded before the internet existed. Drawing on audience studies literature, I argue that these findings likely reflect audience preferences for familiar, popular brands, as well as structural advantages these brands maintain due to their size and capital. I conclude that the fate of digital news organizations is not just a question of their innovativeness or nimbleness. It is also a question of their ability to combat a combination of powerful, stubborn forces: the habits of the people they hope to reach, and the deep pockets of their competitors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Advent—and Promise—of Digital Native News Publishers

The advent of the internet brought with it a new form of news production: the digital native, or digital-born publication (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). Unlike legacy news outlets, which began before the internet and consequently privileged pre-internet mediums (e.g., broadcast, print, radio), digital native news organizations started with—and create news primarily for—online audiences. Indeed, many do not even have an offline edition (Majó-Vázquez, Nielsen, & González-Bailón, 2019). Similar to legacy news brands, digital native news outlets include generalist publications (e.g., *BuzzFeed* and *Vice*) that seek to emulate a traditional newspaper's coverage of a variety of topics (even if that coverage is produced and presented very differently) as well as outlets focused solely on more niche topics (e.g., criminal justice issues for *The Marshall Project*, music for *Pitchfork*).

Journalism research tends to distinguish between legacy and digital native news publishers for a number of reasons. Legacy news brands are typically larger and older than digital native news outlets, which makes comparing the two a useful way to examine the impact of size and institutional history on journalistic practice (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016; Ferrucci, 2015; Nelson, 2017). Patrick Ferrucci and Tim Vos (2017), for instance, explored how digital journalists conceptualize their own identities, in an effort to understand how this shift from print to online journalism is—and is not—changing how journalists approach their work. Conversely, Nikki Usher (2014) spent five months studying how employees at *The New York Times* were attempting to transition into a digital era. And Caitlin Petre (2015) did a comparison between the two groups, by analyzing how legacy journalists at the *Times* differed from digital native journalists at *Gawker* in their approaches to online audience metrics. Applying this distinction to analyses within journalism studies allows scholars to understand how newer and older news outlets are experimenting with different approaches to revenue—and to what end (Cornia, Sehl, & Kleis Nielsen, 2019; Nee, 2014).

Consequently, comparing legacy and digital native news publishers allows scholars to uncover how attempts within journalism to adapt to an increasingly threatening news media environment are unfolding, as well as how those attempts differ from one kind of news publisher to another. Journalists at digital native news outlets tend to be perceived as less beholden to traditional journalistic practices, which means they arguably have more flexibility to experiment with different approaches to news production. Legacy news outlets, conversely, tend to be perceived as more resistant to change (Cornia et al., 2019). "When it comes to legacy news media and any new digital innovation, you can usually count on two things," reads a recent blog post published by the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism, "the innovation will begin too late, and even when it does, it's often a half-measure that doesn't make up lost time" (Brady, 2019). This is because, as Rebecca Coates Nee concluded in her comparison of legacy and digital native journalists, "online journalists view digital technology as an opportunity, not a threat to which they must adapt or react" (2013, p. 17).

The result of this assumed nimbleness on the part of digital natives is an implicit optimism when it comes to what digital natives might accomplish. This underlying confidence was apparent in the many news articles that expressed bewildered disappointment when, in early 2019, a number of digital native news organizations—

including *BuzzFeed*, *HuffPost*, and *Vice Media*, laid off more than 1,000 employees. As Edmund Lee (2019) wrote in *The New York Times*:

> The cuts at *BuzzFeed* were the most alarming. Wasn't this the company that was supposed to have it all figured out? Didn't its team of wizards, led by the M.I.T.-trained chief executive, Jonah Peretti, know tricks of the digital trade that lay beyond the imagination of fusty old print publishers?

To be sure, there is evidence that suggests this optimism is to some degree warranted: Each year, many legacy news brands struggle to stay financially viable, while digital natives increase in number. There were 138 fewer daily newspapers in 2014 than there were in 2004, according to a recent report by Penny Abernathy (2016). This decrease was caused in part by some newspapers shutting down, and others getting bought and folded into existing brands. Both outcomes stem from the perpetual declines in profit and print readers, leading Abernathy (2016) to conclude that "every newspaper publisher is grappling with an uncertain future." Conversely, the number of employees working at digital natives nearly doubled between 2008 and 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2019). The excitement about digital native news organizations is not simply the result of a set of assumptions about what they might accomplish. It is also based in their increasing numbers and size, both of which suggest that the future of journalism and the future of digital native news publishers are inextricably linked.

However, this notion of digital natives as journalism's harbinger of the future and legacy news publishers as the profession's relics of the past implies an inaccurate understanding of how success and failure actually unfolds within the news media environment. The perspective that legacy brands are losing power and influence in an increasingly crowded news media landscape and are giving way to digital native news brands that will only grow more popular over time overlooks some of the most important—and enduring—characteristics that contribute to how audience attention gets concentrated within journalism. These characteristics notably have little to do with the work that news outlets actually produce, nor the nimbleness with which they produce it. In fact, these factors exist outside of any individual journalist's control, which means they often escape journalists' (and, consequently, journalism scholars') scrutiny. They include characteristics of the news audience, as well as the very structures within which the news media environment functions. It is these factors that I turn to next.

2.2. An Audience Studies Approach to 'the Persistence of Popularity'

Audience studies literature offers a number of explanations for what James Webster and Thomas Ksiazek (2012, p. 51) refer to as "the persistence of popularity" when it comes to media consumption. These include structural—and audience-specific factors that privilege the most familiar brands at the expense of everything else. First, audiences tend to equate popularity with quality (Salganik, Dodds, & Watts, 2006). When it comes to journalism specifically, audiences perceive the popularity of a news story as evidence of both its accuracy and its importance (Asch, 1951; Mutz & Young, 2011). This explains why, for example, when audiences seek out news, they privilege stories that have been "liked" or "favorited," or that have made a site's "most read" list (Knobloch-Westerwick, Sharma, Hansen, & Alter, 2005; Yang, 2015).

Additionally, audiences exhibit what Harsh Taneja, Angela Wu, and Stephanie Edgerly (2017) refer to as "infrastructural legacy," which they describe as a person's tendency to maintain media consumption routines across different media platforms. So, someone who reads *The New York Times* in print is likely to read it online, rather than seek out a new outlet for a different platform. This finding suggests that legacy brands in journalism are likely to maintain their audiences even as the number of digital native news outlets continues to grow—and even if those outlets provide journalism that more aligns with audience preferences. As Taneja et al. (2017, p. 1795) write, "Visiting sites with legacy status is more about established habits brought online and not specific preferences for content."

There are also a number of structural forces within the news media environment that further encourage audiences to maintain their concentration among a small number of already popular brands. The social media platforms that people increasingly turn to for news, for instance, tend to rely on algorithms that privilege popularity above other characteristics (Bucher, 2017; Carlson, 2017). This means that a news story from a familiar brand (e.g., *The Washington Post*) is more likely to get pushed into audiences' newsfeeds than the same story from a newer, lesser known outlet (Nelson, 2019). A digital native news outlet therefore faces an uphill battle to build its popularity so that its content can enjoy these sorts of advantages enjoyed by its older, more established competitors.

The most successful legacy news brands also benefit from a media environment that offers outlets with deep pockets a variety of means by which to expand their reach. As Matthew Hindman (2018) writes, the internet has not lowered the costs of media distribution—it has simply changed what those costs entail. News brands that have been around for a long time and have more capital to draw from (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*) are able to invest more money into expensive techniques intended to increase the scope of their distribution than many of their smaller, newer competitors. These techniques include A/B headline testing (Bulik, 2016), as well as the personalization of news (Thurman, Moeller, Helberger, & Trilling, 2018). As a result of these distribution advantages, Hindman concludes that "big sites can dominate even if smaller sites

produce better content that perfectly matches users' preferences" (2018, p. 8).

To be sure, in addition to these distribution advantages, many legacy brands also benefit from an important production benefit as well: They have the means to invest in a larger amount of original reporting than many of the digitally native startups they are competing against. *The Washington Post*, for example, publishes about 500 stories per day (Meyer, 2016). *LevittownNow.com*, a small, digitally native local news site based in Pennsylvania, publishes about 50 stories per week. *The New York Times* employs 1,600 journalists, while *The Marshall Project* employs roughly 20. So, it is not just the structures behind digital distribution that favor legacy brands, but their ability to produce news that is distinctive, and at scale, as well.

In light of this literature, as well as previous studies that have found that media audiences continue to congregate among the most popular, established brands, the promise of digital native news publishers to forge the path forward for journalism becomes a bit less persuasive. These outlets may boast more experimental approaches to news production, making them perhaps quicker to adapt to an increasingly unstable news media environment. They may also produce news that are better attuned to the desires of the online audiences they have decided to pursue. But even if those two things were true, they would not necessarily guarantee that digital native news outlets would consequently attract larger audiences than the legacy news brands many believe they will soon overshadow. Instead, it would appear more likely that, even in a media environment with many digital native news outlets, the most popular will continue to be legacy brands that many are already familiar with. With that, my hypothesis is as follows:

> H1: In a saturated news media environment, audience attention continues to be concentrated among established, legacy news brands.

3. Method

3.1. Data

My data come from Comscore, a media and audience measurement company that reports monthly estimates of online audience behavior. I was granted access to Comscore's data through a subscription paid for by my university. Scholars have previously used Comscore data to study a variety of aspects of news audience behavior. These include fake news consumption (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Nelson & Taneja, 2018), mobile news consumption (Nelson, 2019; Nelson & Lei, 2018), political news consumption (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011; Nelson & Webster, 2017), and audience engagement with news (Nelson & Webster, 2016).

One of the biggest assets of audience measurement data provided by companies such as Comscore is the way in which these data are collected. Comscore data are actual observations of audience behavior, rather than self-reports collected via surveys or interviews. This methodological distinction is valuable because audiences often misremember or exaggerate their news media consumption (Prior, 2009), a tendency that scholars have found is even more extreme in today's seemingly endless media landscape (Taneja, Webster, Malthouse, & Ksiazek, 2012). Audience measurement data providers are able to sidestep these methodological issues. Instead, these firms collect their audience data using software installed on a person's digital device that automatically records their media behavior (Taneja, 2016). This passive data collection results in a more precise record of news audience behavior.

As previous studies have explained, Comscore collects data: (1) from its panels of mobile device and desktop computer users; and (2) from online publishers who place Comscore tags on their websites (Nelson, 2019). These tags give Comscore the ability to observe and record each instance in which audiences access these publishers' content, while Comscore's panels give Comscore the ability to validate that the online behavior recorded by the tags is consistent with the actual online audience. After Comscore collects these data, the company runs data cleansing and validation processes, which results in a dataset of online usage data divided by site.

Comscore collects data about digital audience behavior from around the world; however, this study focuses on Comscore's U.S. dataset. As previous studies that have drawn from Comscore's U.S. data have noted (Nelson, 2019), the company's desktop panel comprises about 1 million people, who load Comscore meters onto their desktop devices. Comscore's U.S. mobile panel includes about 30,000 people across iPhones, iPads, and Android devices. Similar to the desktop panelists, the mobile panelists download a meter onto their devices that monitors their online behavior. Comscore's meter tracks the URLs that each user visits, as well as the time they spend looking at each address. These panels are then weighted and projected to the U.S. online audience at large. Comscore then uses the data collected from these panels to create a projection of de-duplicated multi-platform usage. Doing so ensures that panelists who visit a news site on a mobile device and then the same site on a desktop computer are still only counted as one visitor to the site, rather than two.

Comscore recruits people 18 and older to join its mobile and desktop panels. To do so, the company uses online market research firms such as PermissionResearch and OpinionSquare. Comscore panelists are offered various benefits to participate, including opportunities to win money, donate to charity, or participate in an online rewards program. For the desktop panel, which may include one computer shared among multiple family members, Comscore employees further examine these visitation data to assign different online behaviors to different household members.

Comscore publishers can create hierarchies of their owned and operated websites and mobile apps, which allows these publishers to observe the full, unduplicated reach across their inventory of websites and apps. Comscore also classifies websites into categories, such as education, sports, and retail. This study's sample comprised the websites within Comscore's "News" category. As Nelson observed in a previous study drawn from Comscore data (2019), the company has a minimum reporting threshold for any one entity to be reported in a given month. Consequently, the number of reportable entities can vary from month to month.

In this analysis, the number of News/Information web entities analyzed included 1,645 entities in the multi-platform dataset. These sites included legacy news brands (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*), digital native news outlets (e.g., *BuzzFeed*, *Vox*), in addition to a wide variety of other kinds of news producers, such as partisan media (e.g., *MSNBC*, *Drudge Report*), local news sources (e.g., *Philly.com*, *Las Vegas Review*), and sources for information about the weather (e.g., *The Weather Company*, *AccuWeather*).

3.2. Analysis

To examine the size of the audiences to legacy and digital native news sites, I utilized Comscore's measure of 'unique visitors.' This metric refers to a person who visited a site at least once in a given month. The unique visitor metric is one of the most commonly used within the digital media industry to evaluate audience reach (Nelson, 2019). That said, it is not a flawless metric: Users who clear cookies or browse in "private" or "incognito" mode can distort counts of the actual online audience to the point where "the unique-visitor-to-actual-person ratio is four to one or higher on many sites" (Hindman, 2018, p. 107). However, Comscore collects its data from both its panel as well as browser cookies, which means that the company's datasets "should not suffer from the overcounting of audience reach endemic to other data sources" (Hindman, 2018, p. 107).

I compiled a Comscore dataset that comprised the distribution of multi-platform unique visitors to all of the sites within the news category each month between September 2018 and September 2019. My analysis began by examining a random month within the sample to observe whether or not online audiences followed an "80/20 power law distribution" (Webster, 2014) where the majority of the audience's attention would be focused among a small number of highly popular news outlets. After I observed that this audience distribution was indeed the case, I calculated the averages of unique visitors to the news sites within my dataset between September 2018 and September 2019 to ensure that this distribution held true over time.

Once it was apparent that audiences were indeed congregating among a small number of the most popular news sites within the dataset both within an individual month as well as over time, I narrowed my analysis to the top 100 sites where the bulk of that audience attention was concentrated. A research assistant and I then independently coded each of these sites to determine which were "legacy" news brands—meaning they were originally founded for a non-digital platform—and which were "digital native" news brands—meaning they were originally founded for the internet. Our intercoder reliability was 0.92. I then calculated the percentage of legacy news sites these 100 most popular news sites comprised as well as the percentage of digital native news sites.

I concluded my analysis by performing a Point-Biserial Correlation on these 100 sites to observe whether a news site being a legacy brand was significantly related to its popularity (measured by unique visitors). Point-Biserial Correlations are used when correlating a dichotomous variable with a continuous variable. In this instance, the dichotomous variable was whether or not a news site is a legacy brand, while the continuous variable was the audience size. Point-Biserial Correlations follow the same assumptions as Pearson correlations.

4. Results

I began by examining the distribution of the online audience across news sites in March 2019. The data indeed revealed an 80/20 power law distribution. Although there was a long tail of online news sites within the dataset, the bulk of the online audience was concentrated at the head (Figure 1). For example, of the 232 million people who visited a news site in March 2019, about 146 million visited *CNN*, about 142 million visited *Yahoo-HuffPost*, and about 132 million visited *USA Today*. Each of these were among the top ten most popular sites, which also included *NBC News*, *The Weather Company*, *Fox News*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. Conversely, only 35,000 people visited *MinnPost.com*, which ranked 703rd in unique visitors in March 2019.

Next, I calculated the averages of unique visitors to the news sites within my dataset between September 2018 and September 2019. I found that audience attention maintained the same power law distribution, again with the bulk of the audience concentrated at the head of the long tail (Figure 2).

Once it was clear that audience attention was skewed to the head of the long tail, I narrowed my dataset to the 100 most popular news sites and, with the help of a research assistant, determined which sites were legacy and which were digital native news brands. I found that, of the 100 most popular news sites, 66 were legacy news brands, while the remaining 34 were digital native news brands. Furthermore, of the 10 most popular news sites—the only sites in the sample to attract, on average, roughly 100 million visitors each month—six were legacy news brands, while the remaining four were digital natives.

Finally, I performed a Point-Biserial Correlation on these 100 sites to observe whether a news site being a legacy brand was significantly related to its popular-

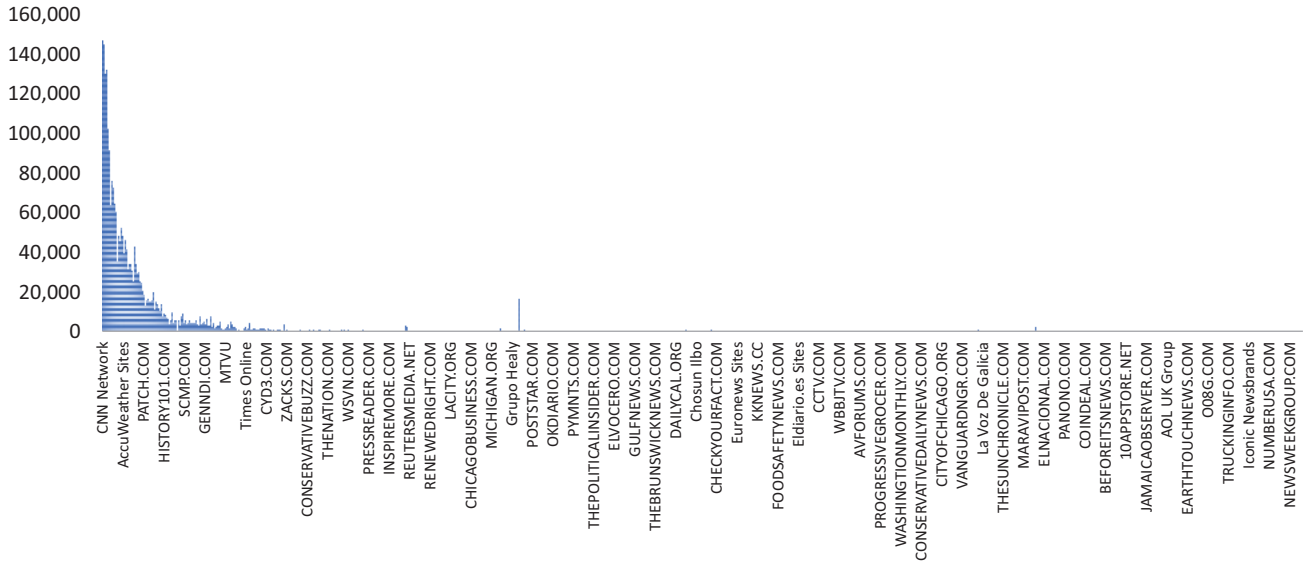

Figure 1. The online audience distribution to news sites in March 2019, measured in unique visitors (in thousands).

ity. I found that the relationship between these two variables was weak (0.08) and not statistically significant ($p = 0.43$). So, while the most popular news sites among audiences includes many legacy news brands, there was no statistical reason to expect that one must follow the other.

5. Discussion

5.1. Studying What Changes—And What Endures

Because so much within the news media environment appears to be in a perpetual state of transition, it is reasonable to wonder what about the profession has held constant, if anything. Audiences once deliberately consumed news via print papers or television broadcasts, but now do so "incidentally" while scanning social media newsfeeds on their mobile devices (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). News publishers once targeted homogenous, mass audiences, but now increasingly rely on sophisticated audience data to focus specifically on distinct groups (Nelson, 2017; Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018). And the advertising-supported revenue model continues to show signs that it alone cannot be counted on to keep news organizations financially stable (Braun & Eklund, 2019), which has compelled many of them to look to alternative means, such as subscriptions, donations, native advertising, and foundation support (Amazeen & Wojdynski, 2018; Ferrucci & Nelson, 2019; Hansen & Goligoski, 2018; Moritz, 2018). Even digital outlets like *BuzzFeed*, which became renowned for appearing to crack the code to economic

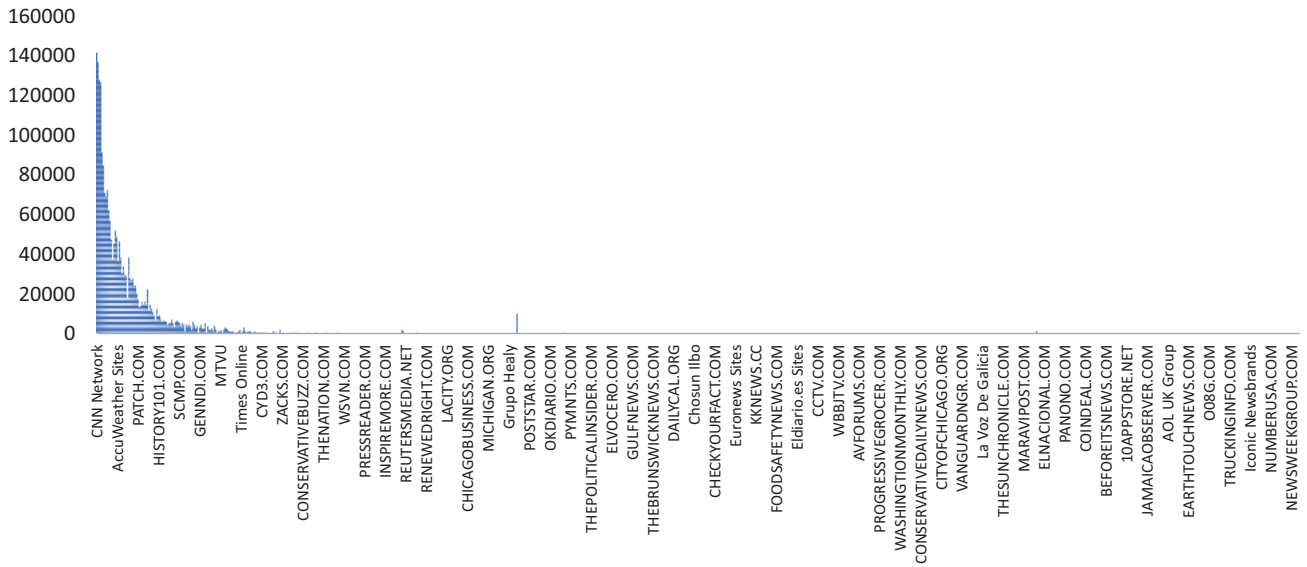

Figure 2. The average online audience distribution to news sites between September 2018 and September 2019, measured in unique visitors (in thousands).

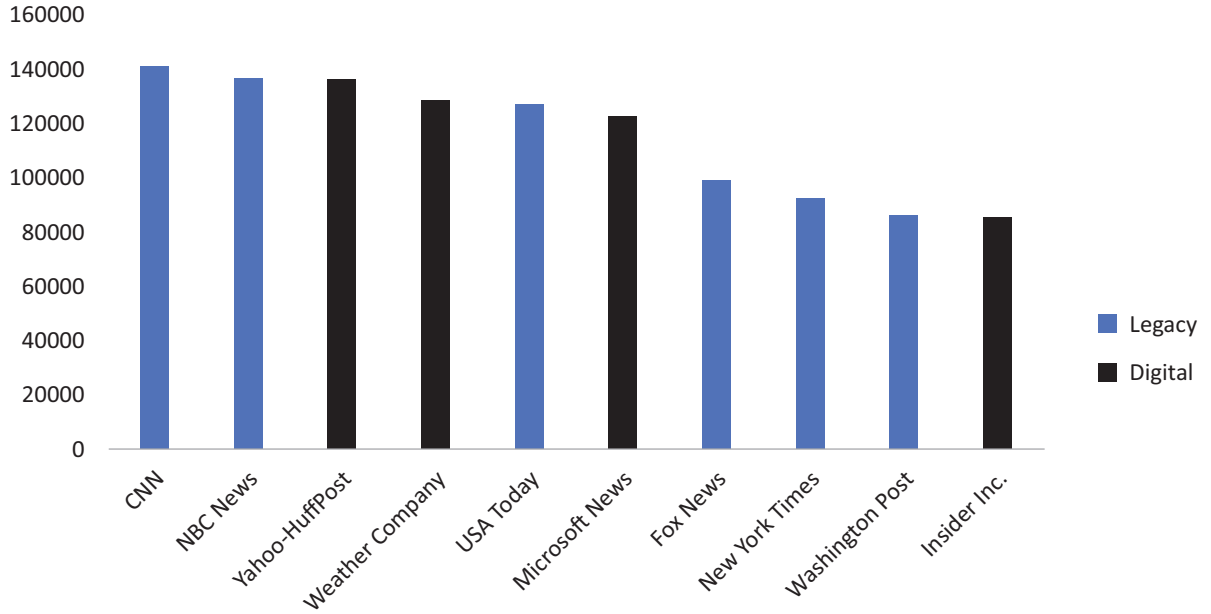

Figure 3. The average online audience for the most popular news sites in the dataset between September 2018 and September 2019, measured in unique visitors (in thousands).

sustainability via digital advertising revenue, has recently begun experimenting with audience-supported revenue via its paid membership program (Schmidt, 2018). These are significant changes and have rightfully garnered a great deal of scrutiny from journalism researchers and practitioners alike.

However, focusing primarily on what changes within journalism runs the risk of overlooking what remains the same: namely, where audiences actually turn to for news. As these findings demonstrate, even in an increasingly saturated news media environment, audiences continue to concentrate their attention within a small number of news outlets, the bulk of which comprises familiar, established brands. The evidence presented here joins a growing list of scholarship that corroborates the notion that news media routines are much more rigid than many might expect. Contrary to fears of "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011), scholars have found that when it comes to political news consumption, fake news consumption, and mobile news consumption, audiences tend to skew toward a small number among well-known, popular news brands (Nelson, 2019; Nelson & Taneja, 2018; Nelson & Webster, 2017). The result is the perpetuation of a "winner takes all" media environment, or what Webster (2014) refers to as the "massively overlapping culture," where a majority of the media audience continues to devote its attention to a small number of familiar, established brands. As Nelson (2019, p. 2) recently concluded, "It seems no matter how long the long tail grows, audiences are still reluctant to venture far from its head."

5.2. Limitations

This study faced several limitations, the most significant of which was the inability to take a more longitudinal approach to the data analysis. Although the Comscore dataset included a year's worth of online visitation data, it did not allow for a comparison of that year's data with the years before. Also, these data were outlet-specific, meaning I was only able to analyze news audiences who decided to visit a specific news organization's website. This means I could not examine news exposure that took place passively (or "incidentally") via social media, an increasingly popular mode of news consumption (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019; Thorson & Wells, 2016). However, while the news consumption behavior exhibited by those who passively consume news via social media might be very different from those who actively load pages for specific news outlets, it is more likely that both groups stumble onto many of the same sources of information, but only one group decides to click.

Furthermore, these data were platform-specific. While I could see how many people visited legacy and digital-native news outlets online, I could not compare those data with data showing how many people watched, listened to, or read those legacy news outlets on the mediums they perhaps originally focused on. However, since the purpose of this study was to explore whether or not the popularity of legacy news brands has endured in an online environment, as well as to compare the popularity of legacy news brands with that of digital native news brands, the online-specific data offered by Comscore was the most useful kind to draw from.

Another limitation of this study is that while its analysis focused on measures of popularity within the digital news media landscape, it did not touch on the relationship between each news outlet's popularity and its revenue model. This is worth acknowledging at a moment when the news industry finds itself increas-

ingly in agreement that digital advertising revenue—which privileges audience reach above all else—cannot alone sustain a news outlet (Chyi & Tenenboim, 2019; Thompson, 2018). In light of the layoffs at *BuzzFeed*, for example, there was widespread consensus that the cuts were due in part to the company's dependence on digital ad revenue and its reluctance to embrace paywalls or other forms of audience support (Lee, 2019; Uberti, 2019). While this approach to revenue appeared at least somewhat viable in the early 2000s, it has faltered more recently due to the consolidation of online advertising among Google, Amazon, and Facebook (Nielsen, Cornia, & Kalogeropoulos, 2016). As Kate Knibbs (2019) wrote in *The Ringer*, "Facebook and Google's emergence as publisher-platforms with near-unfettered power has cratered the advertiser-supported model." So, while a news site like *Yahoo-HuffPost News Network* may attract a hundred million more unique visitors than *The Wall Street Journal* in a given month, the latter—due to its long-standing paywall—might actually be the more sustainable of the two organizations.

Consequently, assuming newsrooms continue to look toward paywalls, subscriptions, memberships, and other forms of audience-supported revenue, they may focus less on amassing the largest audience and more on attracting the most loyal one. Should that indeed be the case, it will become increasingly important to understand a news outlet's path to revenue when analyzing the implications of the size of its audience. This gets to the final limitation of this study, which is that its focus on measures of popularity runs the risk of conflating the aspirations of legacy news brands with those of digitally native news outlets. Although journalism stakeholders have looked to digitally native news startups to pave the path for journalism's future, they have not necessarily done so with the expectation that these outlets would match or exceed legacy outlets in terms of overall audience reach. This makes sense given the different approaches to success typically pursued by legacy news brands as compared to digitally native ones.

Indeed, the idea of bundling a variety of subjects within one overarching media brand—long embraced by daily newspapers—appears to have been all but discarded by many digitally native news outlets. They instead seem to be attempting to compete with legacy outlets within specific verticals (e.g., technology, entertainment, criminal justice). So, for example *NBC News Digital*—one of the most popular brands among online news audiences, according to the Comscore data—comprises more than three hundred different verticals, including those for local news stations (*NBC Philadelphia*, *NBC Miami*), political news (*MSNBC*, *NBC News Politics*), and entertainment news (*E! News*, *Today Pop Culture*). Conversely, less popular, digital native brands like *Gizmodo* comprise only one. This distinction is indicative of the fact that the economics for digital native news outlets are different, and so their missions have been different from the outset.

Yet despite the fact that legacy and digital native news sites have such different compositions and goals, there is still much to be gained from this sort of comparison between the two. After all, every news site participates in the same competition for audience attention, regardless of the breadth or variety of its offerings. Of course, while this study has taken an initial step toward understanding how this competition unfolds in an online environment, there is much more to be done. Future research should examine the relationship between the amount of audience attention an outlet attracts with other variables that play pivotal roles in determining whether that outlet succeeds or fails: the scope of its coverage, the scale of its operation, and the approach it takes to monetization.

6. Conclusion

These findings are significant for a number of reasons. First, by presenting a more accurate portrait of how online audiences actually consume news, these results indicate just how challenging it is for digital news providers just starting out to break into the news media landscape and build up an audience. One might think that digital native news outlets would enjoy greater advantages when it comes to finding audiences on the internet, since it is a medium that they have focused on since their inception. However, the fact that so many of the most popular online news sites are owned by brands in news that began with television, print, or radio suggests that any sort of internet savvy that digital native news publishers enjoy may not be enough to overcome the advantages held by more longstanding brands in news. On the contrary, as Hindman (2018) has pointed out, these results indicate that digital native news sites within the news media environment face significant disadvantages that must be overcome—namely, onerous distribution costs, stubborn audiences, and social media platforms primed to privilege the familiar over the novel. Rather than make the internet more democratic and egalitarian, all of these challenges are likely to exacerbate an already highly unequal playing field.

To be sure, the fact that about a third of the 100 most popular news sites were digital natives, combined with the fact that there was not a strong correlation between the popularity of a news site and its status as a legacy news brand, indicates that while the distribution of audience attention across the news media environment may be slow to change, it certainly is not fixed. The successful capture of audience attention, however, is far from guaranteed, especially for news outlets that lack the same level of capital and brand-recognition as their established competitors.

Furthermore, the increasing amount of consolidation within the news media environment will likely lead to even greater disparity between the most and least popular brands. In 2019, New Media Investment Group merged with Gannett, making it the largest newspaper company in the U.S. (Tracy, 2019). The new Gannett now

owns more than 20 percent of all U.S. daily newspapers (Doctor, 2020). And consolidation is not only affecting legacy brands, but digital natives as well: for example, *Yahoo* and *HuffPost* merged in 2017. In March 2019, according to the Comscore data, the *Yahoo-HuffPost News Network* had 416 different verticals. These developments indicate that as more news providers get purchased by or merge with larger entities, we are likely to see further audience concentration among an even smaller number of brands.

In short, the path toward financial stability in journalism is unlikely to be trailed solely by digital native news outlets. Instead, in an increasingly hostile news media environment, these findings suggest that different journalism stakeholders are embracing different approaches to success. Some are attempting to emulate the traditional model of bundling verticals with the hopes of garnering a greater portion of audience. Others are pursuing financial stability by finding success on a smaller scale—through specialized, limited coverage intended for niche audiences. As Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2019) wrote recently:

> Many trying to make the transition from offline to online will not succeed. Often, those trying to build something new will fail. Some of those who succeed will still fall short of their hopes and aspirations. Very few will generate anything like the revenues or profits we saw in the past. But more and more are finding their own ways forward, on that basis they will be able to do important, independent, journalistic work, and we should recognize and celebrate that.

Understanding the obstacles that stand in the way of success in today's news media environment, and their disparate impact on those attempting success, is an important step toward determining how the news media landscape will continue to change—and how it will not. As this study has shown, only by complementing studies of what changes with examinations of what endures will we understand how transformation actually unfolds within the news media environment, as well as the implications of both for those who publish the news and the people they hope to reach.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Why Do Digital Native News Media Fail? An Investigation of Failure in the Early Start-Up Phase

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Abstract
Digital native news media have great potential for improving journalism. Theoretically, they can be the sites where new products, novel revenue streams and alternative ways of organizing digital journalism are discovered, tested, and advanced. In practice, however, the situation appears to be more complicated. Besides the normal pressures facing new businesses, entrepreneurs in digital news are faced with specific challenges. Against the background of general and journalism specific entrepreneurship literature, and in light of a practice–theoretical approach, this qualitative case study research on 15 German digital native news media outlets empirically investigates what barriers curb their innovative capacity in the early start-up phase. In the new media organizations under study here, there are—among other problems—a high degree of homogeneity within founding teams, tensions between journalistic and economic practices, insufficient user orientation, as well as a tendency for organizations to be underfinanced. The patterns of failure investigated in this study can raise awareness, help news start-ups avoid common mistakes before actually entering the market, and help industry experts and investors to realistically estimate the potential of new ventures within the digital news industry.

Keywords
digital-born news media; digital native news media; entrepreneurial journalism; news start-ups; practice theories

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship and novel business ventures are seen as crucial drivers of media industry change and transformation (e.g., Deuze & Witschge, 2020; Küng, 2015; van Weezel, 2010). In theory, digital native news outlets such as *BuzzFeed* (US), *Mediapart* (France) or *De Correspondent* (Netherlands) can be environments where new products, alternative revenue streams, and innovative ways of organizing digital journalism are discovered, tested, and advanced. However, in practice, the situation seems to be more complicated. Regardless of the type of industry, most newly established ventures fail: In developed countries, only around half of them remain in business for at least five years (Shane, 2008, p. 98). Moreover, besides the usual pressures that cause start-ups to terminate business such as market competition or poor product performance, previous research has shown that entrepreneurs in digital news face challenges such as lack of business knowledge, low social capital, entrenched legacy media thinking, and role conflicts (e.g., Heft & Dogruel, 2019; Naldi & Picard, 2012; Powers & Zambrano, 2016; Salaverría, Sádaba, Breiner, & Warner, 2019).

While some research has been carried out on their difficult market situation (e.g., Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Nicholls, Shabbir, & Nielsen, 2016), there a particular research gap persists concerning the typical pitfalls of digital native news media in their early start-up phase during the period in which the conditions of the media market have not yet exerted much pressure on them. As in other industries (e.g., Loasby, 2007), it is assumed that many of these ventures never reach a company life-cycle stage where they can operate and potentially thrive in

the market. Therefore, this article addresses the following research question:

RQ: Why do digital native news media fail in their early start-up phase?

To answer this question, 15 news start-ups in the German market were examined applying in-depth case study research. The article approaches its research topic from a practice–theoretical angle (e.g., Champenois, Lefebvre, & Ronteau, 2019; Witschge & Harbers, 2018): By closely focusing on actual patterns of entrepreneurial activity during the early start-up stage, a detailed and nuanced picture of the mutual processes surrounding the failure of digital native news media can be drawn, going beyond the often vague factors compiled in general entrepreneurship literature. The conclusions of this study can help news start-ups to survive the rough phase before actual market entry and help industry experts as well as investors to realistically estimate potential of these ventures.

2. Theoretical Approaches

2.1. Potential of Digital Native News Media in the Transformation of Journalism

In the last few years, globally, a large number of new journalistic organizations—often referred to as digital-born news media, digital native news media, news/journalism start-ups—have been started aside from traditional companies and institutionalized media markets (e.g., Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016; Deuze & Witschge, 2020; Sehl, 2019; Usher & Kammer, 2019; Wu, 2016). Exemplarily ventures include outlets such as *The Huffington Post* in the US, *El Diario* in Spain, *Krautreporter* in Germany, or *Zetland* in Denmark. An established definition states that these outlets are built around a digital presence, have no formal affiliation to any legacy news organization, and seek to be recognized as journalistic by their peers (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Deuze & Witschge, 2020; Powers & Zambrano, 2016).

In Germany, for instance, several of these ventures have been launched in the last couple of years, particularly following the economic and financial downturn of the late 2000s and the closure of newspapers such as the German edition of *The Financial Times* in 2012 (Buschow, 2018). Unlike in the US (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2019), no precise figures and longitudinal data are available. In sum, however, the crisis has affected the German media market to a lesser degree: Germany is still regarded as a newspaper country with a media landscape mainly populated by private legacy players and public broadcasters (Friedrichsen, 2017; Nicholls et al., 2016). This creates a complicated market situation for new entrants (if they even make it that far). Moreover, little private seed funding (e.g., venture capital) is available (Buschow, 2018) and despite the increasingly difficult situation of local journalism, state subsidies have only recently been discussed. In contrast to other European countries (e.g., van Kranenburg, 2017), so far, there are only a few small, regionally-orientated innovation funds for new media organizations available. Overall, the media market's relatively stable situation and the lack of seed funding reduces the probability of success for start-ups in German journalism.

Nevertheless, even in this situation digital native news media are perceived as laboratories for innovation and as trendsetters, offering hope for the future of journalism (Buschow, 2018). At least two streams of literature from media management research explain their innovative potential:

1. Unlike legacy media organizations, news start-ups are, in principle, far less dependent on extant sector-specific traditions and aim to differentiate themselves from other established market players. Above all, it seems important that they are born and "imprinted" (Stinchcombe, 1965, p. 153) under conditions of digital network media. This is what fundamentally distinguishes them from newspaper publishers who are often caught up in the structural logic of their main production technology—i.e., printing media—and the resulting production rhythms, work practices, business models, etc. (Koch, 2008). Therefore, from the perspective of the organizational path dependency approach (Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009), in contrast to traditional media houses, start-ups might be more likely to create novel products, alternative revenue streams, and organization models for journalism aside from the current industry pathways.
2. Neo-institutional analysis suggests that isomorphic tendencies between start-ups and legacy media will arise (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These convergences are driven by an increase in the number of actors who observe and imitate alternative structures, practices, and products as well as by the exchange of employees between these organizations. Hence, new institutionalism implies that novel ventures can act as role models and prototypes for the transformation of legacy media companies and the industry as a whole (Deuze, 2017; Wagemans, Witschge, & Deuze, 2016).

In light of these theoretical arguments, new venture creation appears to be a promising engine of innovation and renewal in the media industry. In practice, however, the realization of this theoretical potential is limited by the problems and challenges faced by novel organizations in digital journalism.

2.2. Causes of Failure: Why Do Start-Ups Terminate Business?

In line with empirical success factor research within studies of business and management, research into gen-

eral entrepreneurship is primarily concerned with factors that enhance the chances of a start-up's prosperity. However, this stream of literature cannot hide the fact that, regardless of the industry type, high start-up closure rates are observed: For instance, Schindele and Weyh (2011) were able to show that 50 percent of all businesses in a West German cohort started from 1976 to 2005 were shut down during their first six to seven years. Entrepreneurship research expects a general "liability of newness": The younger an organization, the higher the probability of its shutdown (Stinchcombe, 1965, p. 148). However, it should be noted that not all start-ups close through failure, but through their own profitable exit or voluntary discontinuation (Parker, 2009, pp. 386–388).

In general, companies go through several development stages along a defined life-cycle (e.g., Greiner, 1972), typically divided into pre-seed, seed, growth, establishment, and consolidation/revitalization. Van Gelderen, Thurik, and Bosma (2005, p. 366) further differentiate the early start-up phase (pre-seed and seed) into four stages: A first stage, where the intention to establish an enterprise is developed; a second, where the entrepreneurial opportunity is recognized and a concept is developed; a third, where resources are allocated and the organization is set-up; and a fourth, where the venture starts to operate on the market. The latter three stages, in particular, describe the crucial entrepreneurial process of moving from a simple business idea to the growth of a company.

However, in each of these life-cycle phases, a variety of individual, organizational, and structural reasons can lead to the termination of activities—implying that a company does not reach the next phase of the life-cycle. Regardless of the stage of development, a review of entrepreneurship literature shows that the following sources of failure are typically considered in research (e.g., Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Neumann, 2017; Parker, 2009; Stinchcombe, 1965):

- Knowledge, i.e., lack of (business/industry) experience, education, entrepreneurial capabilities, managerial ability, technical skills;
- Team constellations, i.e., small number of founders, coordination difficulties, lack of competences;
- Resources, i.e., insufficient assets, lack of (seed) money, initial capital (liability of smallness);
- Networks, i.e., difficulties of establishing relationships with customers, suppliers, and business partners;
- Industry configuration, i.e., characteristics of markets, intensity of competition, lack of need for product(s);
- Legitimacy, i.e., lack of societal acceptance and reputation.

This summary of general failure factors sensitizes researchers to possible lines of inquiry. However, it seems almost impossible to compile a both comprehensive and adequately specified list of determinants spanning all industries. Moreover, previous research seldom distinguishes the patterns of failure which relate to a company's stage in its life-cycle (van Gelderen et al., 2005). Thus, a greater empirical value should lie in the close investigation of certain start-ups' specific challenges in order to obtain a detailed and differentiated understanding of the processes surrounding failure in one industry (Neumann, 2017).

As the media industry differs considerably from other industries (Lowe, 2016), there is reason to assume that patterns of failure are likewise distinct from start-ups' demise in other sectors. Indeed, previous research has stressed the following problem areas faced by news start-ups: lack of business and market knowledge due to founders' professional backgrounds in journalism (e.g., Salaverría et al., 2019); low social and symbolic capital held by journalist founders (Powers & Zambrano, 2016); entrenched legacy media thinking applied to new ventures, which leads to outdated ideas about organizations, revenue models, users etc. (Naldi & Picard, 2012; Sommer, 2018); as well as role conflicts that give rise to ethical challenges and organizational tensions (Carbasse, 2015; Heft & Dogruel, 2019). However, although failure appears to be common in digital native news media, and even the survival of a newly started organization is often considered a success (e.g., Brouwers, 2018; Bruno & Nielsen, 2012), the current state of research on this topic is still limited. So far, findings have tended to be merely auxiliary findings, having been gleaned from other studies which actually had different research interests.

Hence, in this literature review, two central limitations become apparent: First, the rather generalized factors which lead to failure, as identified by entrepreneurship studies, are too vague and are of only limited help in the sector-specific study of news start-ups. Second, although some research has been carried out on the (difficult) market conditions for digital native news media (e.g., Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Nicholls et al., 2016), the actual pitfalls and challenges in starting up such a venture are not well understood. In particular, the early start-up phase before media market conditions are able to exert much pressure has received little research attention so far. These limitations clearly underline the persistence of the research gap concerning the failure of digital native news outlets.

2.3. Practice–Theoretical Perspective: Understanding Failure in Start-Up Practices of Digital-Born News Media

In order to fill this gap and explore the failure of new ventures in the news industry in as nuanced a way as possible, this study applies a practice–theoretical perspective. Although a fragmented stream of literature with different schools of thought, theories of practice have attracted increasing attention in numerous fields of social sciences in recent years, since they potentially of-

fer innovative ways of conceptualizing the social world (e.g., Nicolini, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). This is also true for journalism studies (e.g., Witschge & Harbers, 2018) and entrepreneurship research (e.g., Champenois et al., 2019; Johannisson, 2011). For instance, Champenois et al. (2019) recommended basically re-focusing entrepreneurship research "towards real entrepreneurial actions in which concrete people engage in particular times and in particular places or circumstances" (p. 6).

In this regard, theories of social practice are a particularly promising starting point for research in underexplored fields: While traditional entrepreneurship studies often tend to describe and explain starting up primarily based on the founders' intentions and characteristics or market determinants and, in doing so, overemphasize the role of either individual actors' capabilities or structural conditions, practice theories avoid such shortfalls (Champenois et al., 2019; Johannisson, 2011). A practice point of view helps to overcome the current lack of systematic understanding of new venture creation in the news industry by focusing on the concrete, situated activities in the ongoing processual becoming of an organization—on entrepreneurs' every-day steps in the creation of a new organization. The fundamental constituents of this process are considered to be social practices, typically understood as patterns of action that are regularly enacted in similar ways by different actors at different times and at different places/circumstances.

From this theoretical angle, starting a digital native news media organization is characterized by a set of interrelated start-up practices through which such organizations are developed and, if successful, perpetuated (Shove et al., 2012). In empirical research, start-up practices are not predefined by extant categories or definitions, rather they are uncovered from a "bottom-up" perspective in order to grasp the context-specific entrepreneurial activities, resources, procedures as well as the meaning attached to them in practice (Champenois et al., 2019). In this study, practice theories form "a heuristic device, a sensitising 'framework"' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 257) for the empirical exploration of activities as well as the failures in setting up a digital native news media—a process that has so far remained largely unexplored.

3. Methods

A practice–theoretical approach calls for an open and exploratory research design in order to reveal a broad range of specific sources of failure in start-up practices. Therefore, qualitative comparative case study research (Yin, 2014) was conducted, investigating 15 digital-born news media within the German market. Cases were included that met the definition in Section 2.1: Those ventures which started independently of legacy media organizations—no spin-offs or new business units of traditional publishers or broadcasters—as well as ventures primarily focused on the production of journalism, not its dissemination or distribution, and ventures that described themselves as journalistic and seek to be recognized as such by their peers.

3.1. Sample

Because of the volatility and opacity of the field under investigation, three complementary pre-studies (a standardized survey of 29 German media experts, a systematic analysis of trade media coverage as well as an investigation of investors, media industry congresses, and awards/prizes) were triangulated to identify a population of around 200 German news ventures. From this population, 15 cases were selected for in-depth research.

Case selection was based on a most-different design reflecting the following consideration: If the same entrepreneurial activities and challenges occur in a broad variety of disparate organizations, this should increase the generalizability of the empirical findings. The diversity of the cases was determined by the following three criteria, that were determined prior to the in-depth investigation: 1) company status (for profit vs. not-for-profit; identified by corporate form); 2) type of media product(s) produced (digital pure player vs. hybrid media products, e.g., both online and print publications); 3) audience scope (broad general coverage vs. specialized niche journalism).

All start-ups investigated were a maximum of four years old and in one of the following three early stages differentiated by van Gelderen et al. (2005): concept development, resource allocation, or first market operations. To reduce "survival bias"—a bias toward organizations that have succeeded (Parker, 2009, p. 8)—ventures that (at the time of investigation) either struggled with their business or had already been shut down were included as well. Even though this study focuses on failure, it was not only failed cases that were examined: This was to provide a retrospective view of the entire process of venture creation and to identify critical turning points in the history of companies. Due to the number of cases investigated, no longitudinal research framework could be applied. Despite their diversity, what these companies share is that, overall, they have a small workforce size (typically only founders and a network of supporters), achieve low audience reach and—even if they work for profit—do not generate a major surplus for their founders. Table 1 gives a more detailed overview of the cases examined in this study.

3.2. Data Collection

The 15 selected cases were examined in-depth, based on the triangulation of 22 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with founders (approx. 32 hours of audio material), 164 external and internal documents and, where possible, short site visits.

Table 1. Cases investigated in empirical research.

Case	Age	Company status	Type of media product(s)	Audience scope	Status at time of investigation
1	2 years	For profit	Hybrid	General	In operation
2	Less than 1 year	Not-for-profit	Digital pure player	General	Struggling
3	1 year	For profit	Hybrid	General	In operation
4	2 years	For profit	Digital pure player	General	In operation
5	4 years	For profit	Digital pure player	General	In operation
6	1 year	For profit	Hybrid	Niche	In operation
7	2 years	For profit	Hybrid	General	Struggling
8	4 years	For profit	Digital pure player	Niche	Failed
9	2 years	For profit	Digital pure player	Niche	Struggling
10	4 years	Not-for-profit	Hybrid	General	In operation
11	2 years	For profit	Digital pure player	Niche	Failed
12	2 years	For profit	Hybrid	General	In operation
13	1 year	For profit	Hybrid	General	In operation
14	1 year	For profit	Digital pure player	General	Struggling
15	2 years	For profit	Hybrid	General	In operation

To address the research question, interviews were primarily aimed at a detailed reconstruction of the organization's early start-up phase with its every-day activities and events, decisions, as well as the barriers it faced. Documents used included internal (e.g., strategy papers, business plans) and external (e.g., interviews with founders in trade media, manifestos) texts by and about the organization, which had been produced without researcher's influence; they were included to gather further information from the company's past as well as indications of the intentions, goals, and objectives of the start-ups. Site visits focused on working procedures and organizational structures (by means of observable artefacts) and were recorded in the form of field notes.

Data collection took place in 2015 within a broader research project (Buschow, 2018). The case studies had to be anonymized to prevent any harm to the organizations involved, even if this reduces the research's reliability.

3.3. Data Analysis

All three data types obtained (interviews, documents, and field notes) were included in a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). Following up on practice–theoretical assumptions (e.g., Gherardi, 2019; Nicolini, 2012), the initial objective was to uncover start-up practices by analyzing the data bottom-up.

First, for each of the 15 cases, the nature of the organization's set up was derived from the data: What local activities were associated with starting an individual venture? Second, common activities were grouped across the entire sample of organizations with the aim to empirically show the typical ways of developing a new venture in German journalism. From this categorization procedure across cases, the following start-up practices emerged: Administrating, staffing/team building, networking/motivating, moderating, experimenting, and financing. To answer the research question, in a third step, for each of the six start-up practices, the pitfalls and challenges were reconstructed from the data: Where did founders stumble? Which specific barriers curbed the innovative capacities of these news start-ups?

4. Findings and Discussion

Why do news start-ups fail at an early stage of development? In what follows, context-specific and detailed patterns of failure are traced from the empirical case study research. Results are organized according to the six start-up practices typically involved in the development of a news venture in Germany: Administrating, staffing/team building, networking/motivating, moderating, experimenting, and financing. The practice–theoretical angle forms the interpretative background of the following discussion, while the findings are also discussed against the backdrop of literature from entrepreneurship research and journalism studies.

4.1. Administrating: Challenging Tasks and Unexpectedly High Workload

All cases under investigation highlight that starting a new organization in German journalism requires far more extensive and diverse work than being a freelance journalist. In particular, administrative practices (e.g., accounting, negotiating contracts, technology administration), formerly undertaken by the management side of newspaper publishers, also become the founders' responsibility (cf. Salaverría et al., 2019). In contrast, founders who initially expected that 'doing entrepreneurship' would open up new freedom for their own journalistic work—writing, filming, producing, etc.—clearly underestimated the steps involved in setting up a new venture (e.g., cases 5, 9, 10, 11).

Around half of the cases investigated emerged as a result of criticism of legacy newspaper publishers, with

which founders were dissatisfied (cases 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15). Many accused newspapers of hindering real journalistic work: "The journalism of legacy newspaper publishers is exactly that kind of journalism I do not want to do anymore. If there was only this journalism left, I would leave the profession" (case 15). Against this background, it is particularly noteworthy that the founders of case 11—after only a short period in their entrepreneurial role—clearly regretted that the support from publishers was now no longer available to them: "Please give us exactly these publishing staff [we always criticized as a barrier in legacy publishers]! Now we learned what newspaper publishers do for us and how they give us journalists the support [in terms of administration] we need" (case 11). Many of these non-journalistic tasks are necessary even if fast growth, huge profits or a lucrative 'exit' from the company are not the main objectives of their founders, for instance, because they work on a not-for-profit basis.

The cases underline that news entrepreneurs in Germany are often (former) journalists (cases 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15) who now operate beyond the scope of their previous activities and have not yet developed "standard social routines" (Stinchcombe, 1965, p. 149) for their new roles. This is also because new ventures can emerge rather spontaneously: Practice theories help to understand the study's empirical finding that some founders 'stumble' into their role (e.g., cases 12, 13, 15). It is only through what they do, based on the start-up practices they adopt, that they become recognized and described as news entrepreneurs by others. For instance, the initiators of case 12 suddenly found themselves in the entrepreneurs' role, even though they had never intended this; trade media reported on them, they were regarded as role models and invited as speakers to news start-up conferences. Interpreted against practice theories, founders are actually made in their roles by the start-up practices they adopt (Shove et al., 2012)—and, as the cases from the study show, there is a lot of potential for failure due to the challenging (administrative) tasks and unexpectedly high workload.

4.2. Staffing: Teams Are too Homogeneous

Concerning staffing, the teams behind German digital native news media are remarkably homogeneous. Founders rarely come from industries or professions other than journalism. Only two ventures in the diverse sample were started solely by outsiders: Case 8 by founders from culture and philosophy, case 14 by founders with backgrounds in general management, design, and technology. As mentioned above, many of the entrepreneurs in the sample had had traditional industry careers (cases 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15): journalism schools, traineeships, and editorial jobs at newspapers or broadcasters.

When teams are formed around personalities with similar backgrounds, the diversity of emerging challenges to starting up cannot always be efficiently addressed by the founders. It may be—as in some of the cases (7, 9, 11, 12)—that there are no competent actors in the team to accomplish certain practices (e.g., activities in technology development, or sales). As a result, work often has to be outsourced (see Section 4.3) or these practices are completely neglected, possibly delaying or even suppressing the development of new ventures. Against this background, homogeneity of teams can thus be a decisive source of failure.

In contrast, if staffing brings together founders with complementary expertise, the diverse practices in news ventures can be undertaken with greater skill and flexibly. Founders with business backgrounds can help to tackle administrative practices involved in setting up new media companies (see Section 4.1). Coders and developers can help keep pace with the newest technological developments. One founder interviewed in the study underlines the need to include outsiders: "I do not really need any journalists. I do not want to do [business] with journalists" (case 15).

When outsiders are part of a team, this can also help to adopt mindsets and practices from other industries and professions, which may lead to new ways of thinking in journalism. As research on organizational formation has shown (e.g., Padgett & Powell, 2012), innovation is most likely to be generated where people with multiple professional backgrounds collaborate.

4.3. Networking: Lack of Contacts and Relationships

Even if complementary skills are combined in a team, founders can hardly be expected to solve all entrepreneurial challenges on their own. From the very beginning, they need support to help them through the early start-up phase. However, in most cases, these supporters cannot be employed permanently. Thus, news ventures in Germany are heavily dependent on freelancers. Such assistance from the outside is needed in journalistic work but also in design, technology development, marketing, product, legal and accounting—in some cases unpaid as Table 2 highlights.

Empirical evidence from the cases highlights the development of relationships beyond the borders of the organization—i.e., networking—to be a core practice of founders in the early start-up phase. Since work is often unpaid, a key issue for founders is to motivate these supporters in the absence of financial incentives. Case 1 expresses this as follows: "In journalism, where so much is accomplished through social capital, it is hard to say that it does not matter which parties you go to." This result corresponds to research by Powers and Zambrano (2016) who can show that social and symbolic capital are crucial resources for new venture creation in the news industry.

In sum, the news start-ups under study here differ from extant publishing houses in that they have a post-industrial form of organization in which several tasks are outsourced to a network of partners. During the planned

Table 2. Partners involved and type of integration.

Partners (Individual/corporate)	Type of integration	Cases
Authors and supporters in journalism	Paid	3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 14, 15
	Unpaid	1, 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14
Designers (graphic design, editorial design, user experience reviews)	Paid	4, 6, 14, 15
	Unpaid	1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13
Developers, coders (including web development), data experts	Paid	1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14
	Unpaid	9, 11, 12, 13
Marketing, branding, sales consultants	Paid	—
	Unpaid	1, 2, 3, 12
Strategy, business/start-up consultants, project/product managers	Paid	11
	Unpaid	3, 7, 9
Legal advisers and lawyers	Paid	4
	Unpaid	2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 13
Accountants	Paid	12
	Unpaid	2, 5, 7, 13, 15

site visits this became particularly clear: most of the organizations could not be investigated in person (cases 1, 2, 7–10, 12, 13, 15) because they did not have permanent offices, but mainly worked with their supporters virtually through digital media tools. Conversely, if social capital is missing, a news start-up is hard to maintain and establish in Germany. A lack of networking, thus, is an important source of failure.

4.4. Moderating: Conflicts between Journalistic and Economic Practices

One consequence of the diverse everyday entrepreneurial activities in news ventures is a conflict between journalistic and economic perspectives. Typically, in digital-born news media there is a clash of certain start-up practices: Since founders have to be involved all over the place, traditionally competing and contradictory tasks of media work are taken on simultaneously by a single person.

As soon as the editor-in-chief of a venture—as in case 10—sells advertising space in parallel to writing stories, those in charge find themselves in a paradoxical dual role conducting editorial as well as economic practices (cf. Heft & Dogruel, 2019). The potential conflicts of interests become more acute in those ventures where there is no physical division between departments in separated offices since work is mostly organized virtually (cases 1, 2, 7–10, 12, 13, 15). Therefore, in start-ups, it is particularly difficult to achieve the news media's traditional separation between "church and state" (Carbasse, 2015, p. 267).

The cases illustrate that founders do reflect on such role conflicts; however, with increasing financial pressure it becomes difficult to remain true to one's own standards. For instance, in case 11 the team was forced to choose between "accepting a large corporate publishing project [something the founders had always refused to do] or running into personal bankruptcy." Subsequently, if no attempt is made to moderate these conflicts, some ventures cannot proceed due to contradictory and antagonistic practices during the start-up process. This potential source of failure clearly distinguishes digital-born news media from start-ups in other industries, where such conflicting objectives either do not arise or do so much less frequently.

4.5. Experimenting: Ignoring the User's Perspective When Starting Up

In contrast to research by Sommer (2018) who found high market and user orientation among (later stage) news start-ups, the digital native media examined in this study are often initiated from a media creators' perspective that seeks to replicate certain professional standards of journalism under conditions of digital media (cases 1, 2, 3, 7–9, 11, 12, 13, 15). Founders first focus on the production of high-quality content rather than on profit and growth (cf. Deuze, 2017). However, this leads them to largely conceptualize their venture from a journalistic viewpoint. Thus, the interests and needs of potential users play only a minor role in their experimentation with news media content and new journalistic products.

This is aptly illuminated by case 9: Founders of this venture initially pursued two journalistic business ideas and finally chose the one that promised greater market potential—however, the market potential was not seen in terms of users, but in terms of journalistic talent and input. This meant that it was easier for the founders to retrieve existing content from fellow journalists and their networks: "That was the reason why we started [case 9]: Because we immediately had a few authors and knew there were good pictures, good stories" (case 9). Case 9

also illustrates that the success of a venture is deliberately delayed because of journalistic principles:

> Many journalistic products today write according to what people want to read….We could [also] do that, which would probably help us to create a certain reach more quickly….But I don't want to limit myself, I don't feel like doing this….[What we want is to] open new doors for the reader that they may not have thought of. (case 9)

The fact that journalists often 'disregard' their readers is a well-known, historical finding of journalism research (e.g., Beam, 1995), even though increasing datafication and software-based audience observation have let to altered editorial practices in recent years (Tandoc, 2019). Under volatile conditions of the digital market, ignoring the user's perspective has become even more problematic. One of the news entrepreneurs sums up his observation from the failure of his venture as follows: "You cannot pass by the reader these days….This will rarely work immediately or if it does, then only for a short period. Therefore, always try to stay in touch [with your users]" (case 11).

The finding points to the fact that history also 'matters' in digital native news media. These organizations do not emerge out of nowhere, but—as seen through the lens of practice theories—are always shaped by the prior practices of their founders (Nicolini, 2012). Since many of them had had an earlier career in legacy journalism organizations (see Section 4.2), it is not surprising that long-standing practices and mindsets were transferred into new ventures. As a result of such "formational myopia" (Naldi & Picard, 2012, pp. 76–77), digital native news media can be subject to an organizational path dependency as well (Sydow et al., 2009)—which is a decisive source of failure as these organizations then apply the same (unsuccessful) methods as legacy publishers do to respond to market challenges. One of the founders of case 14, an industry outsider, sums it up as follows:

> Start-up founders in news industry…tend to disregard the business model. They [want] to revitalize the old business model. I think this is a great pity. We notice that the old model…is simply being continued….I have never seen such a thing in any other industry before. (case 14)

4.6. Financing: (Under-)Financing News Start-Ups

Today, starting up in the news industry is very cheap, to begin with. Similar to the findings by Compaine and Hoag (2012), German news ventures report only very few factors that hinder initial market access, as barriers to entry (e.g., costs of technology) haven fallen sharply with the rise of digital media. "You do not need much. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection, and a Wordpress system," states the founder of case 5.

However, lowered barriers to initiating a media product in the digital market can lead to misconceptions and false incentives. The financing practices under study here highlight that German news ventures clearly underestimate the cost drivers of later day-to-day business: the difficulty in acquiring users and paying customers; communication via an increasing number of new social media platforms; and, above all, the labor-intensive production of high-quality content. For instance, the French digital native *Mediapart*, which was launched in 2007 by former *Le Monde* and *Libération* journalists (Wagemans et al., 2016), required almost six million Euro in its initial phase. The founders had made serious miscalculations, several times they had to attract further investors (Alfon, 2017). This study also documents cases with very low financial capital: For instance, the founder of case 1 started her business with around 1,000 Euro that she earned by selling 20 bottles of wine that her grandmother had given her at birth.

This is why news start-ups in the German market are often underfunded. Subsequently, atypical working relationships arise in some places (e.g., see Table 2): Key practices end up performed by employees who are engaged on temporary, sometimes voluntary, case-by-case basis. This dependency on unpaid work can contribute to a somehow paradoxical phenomenon: While digital-born news media are often motivated by critique of traditional publishers (see Section 4.1) and try to counteract their precarization of journalism (Örnebring & Conill, 2016), they actually continue the familiar cost-saving tendencies of legacy news publishers and—as an unintended effect (Giddens, 1984)—thus even perpetuate this precarization. Against this background, misjudgments about the financial needs of digital native media organizations must be considered as a major source of failure.

5. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

This article, by taking a practice–theoretical standpoint, has reconstructed the typical challenges and pitfalls in accomplishing start-up practices in the news industry. Beyond the rather vague categorizations of general entrepreneurship studies (cf. Section 2.2), the empirical bottom-up research conducted here contributes significantly to a context-specific understanding and interpretation of the failure of digital native news ventures in their early start-up phase.

Notwithstanding market conditions and structural contexts that obviously play a central role in failure within later development stages, this study focused on the pre-market phase in order to identify those barriers within start-up practices that can hinder the launch of a business in its initial phase even before media market factors exert any pressure. The cases studied shed light on typical start-up practices and key failures associated with them which need to be tackled before actually entering the market and creating media products:

1. Founders need to develop a realistic picture of the *administrative practices* and the exact workload involved in starting up: They need to know what they are actually getting involved in;
2. It needs honesty that founders will not be able to handle everything on their own: *Staffing* and *team building* should be focused on bringing complementary skillsets together to carry out start-up practices more effectively;
3. In every field where teams lack expertise, founders need to rely on *networking*—i.e., their social capital—in order to motivate support to help them through the early start-up phase;
4. Founders must anticipate the potential (ethical) conflict between journalism and economics and develop ad hoc procedures to *moderate* this conflict during day-to-day business;
5. Such conflict can relate to user and market orientation: Even if such an orientation seems inevitable when *experimenting* with digital media products, it must not lead to journalistic standards being undermined;
6. Founders should be highly aware of the financial expenses that a news start-up requires: In their *financing* efforts, they should not fall for the false incentives that lowered market entry barriers have created.

If digital-born news media are to realize their theoretical potential as engines of innovation and renewal in the media industry (cf. Section 2.1), they must survive and prosper. However, in general, founders tend to be overoptimistic and rate the probability of failure as unrealistic (Parker, 2009, pp. 124–128). It is likely that news entrepreneurs also misjudge the challenges they will face when establishing new media ventures. Moreover, for founders who were previously journalists, setbacks are still conceptualized as a major problem, something to be avoided rather than a tool to learn from, as Brouwers (2018) points out. In general entrepreneurship literature, it is argued that first one generation of new ventures has to fail so that others can learn and thrive (e.g., Parker, 2009). News start-ups launched today are attempting to gain knowledge from the past failures of their predecessors in order to pre-empt and avoid the risks. Findings from this study can help nascent entrepreneurs in these efforts as well as emphasize the importance of failure for the overall news market.

Since this study examined the patterns of failure in the early start-up phase when new ventures are not yet exposed to the (competitive) circumstances of a specific (national) media market, the results from the particular German context should be of interest for, and largely be transferable to, other parts of the world. However, there are certainly differences between countries that comparative future research on news start-ups should consider (cf. Section 2.1): For instance, the amount of public and private seed funding (e.g., Kosterich & Weber, 2019), which is insufficient for news start-ups in Germany, as well as the characteristics of founders (e.g., their willingness to take risks), which differ between geographical and cultural regions (Buschow & Laugemann, 2020).

This article has limitations that open up avenues for future research: Although sampling was based on a maximum variation approach and thus covered a wide variety of news start-ups in the field, this study only investigated the German market. On this basis, research could be extended to more markets and regions and compare patterns of failure between them (e.g., Powers & Zambrano, 2016). In addition, research should be expanded to include the factors that contribute to the failure of later life-cycle stages such as market pressure, product characteristics, growth crisis, etc. Furthermore, to better understand the complex processes of a news start-up's demise, future studies should draw on research designs that collect data at several points in time over a certain period of the company life-cycle; the present study has not applied a longitudinal design. In this context, ethnographic research approaches could prove useful. Such follow-up research would further deepen our understanding of the causes and processes surrounding failure, help develop measures to tackle them, and eventually help digital native news media to prosper.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

Data Journalism as a Service: Digital Native Data Journalism Expertise and Product Development

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Abstract
The combined set of skills needed for producing data journalism (e.g., investigative journalism methods, programming, knowledge in statistics, data management, statistical reporting, and design) challenges the understanding of what competences a journalist needs and the boundaries for the tasks journalists perform. Scholars denote external actors with these types of knowledge as interlopers or actors at the periphery of journalism. In this study, we follow two Swedish digital native data journalism start-ups operating in the Nordics from when they were founded in 2012 to 2019. Although the start-ups have been successful in news journalism over the years and acted as drivers for change in Nordic news innovation, they also have a presence in sectors other than journalism. This qualitative case study, which is based on interviews over time with the start-up founders and a qualitative analysis of blog posts written by the employees at the two start-ups, tells a story of journalists working at the periphery of legacy media, at least temporarily forced to leave journalism behind yet successfully using journalistic thinking outside of journalistic contexts.

Keywords
boundary work; data journalism; digital native; Finland; journalism; peripheral actors; Sweden

Issue
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1. Introduction

Embedded in the terms 'digital native' or 'online native' is a precondition that there are (now) news sites without an analogue heritage. Harlow and Salaverría (2016) suggest that digital native news websites are not only innovative start-ups associated with new and alternative ways of producing and presenting journalism with differing degrees of political activism but also funded, or rather underfunded, by new business models. Furthermore, these initiatives are not limited to producing journalism, but also engage in the organization of cultural events, thus expanding on the business models for news production (García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, Arias, & De Lara-González, 2019). According to Harlow and Salaverría (2016), digital native outlets tend to describe their use of technology as different from mainstream media, for example, using data journalism techniques, such as creating databases and infographics and making documents publicly available. These techniques may not be different from what legacy media use, but they are nevertheless associated with being innovative. Developing skills in technology and self-promotion are important for entrepreneurial journalists (Cohen, 2012), a group that includes data journalists. Data journalists, in turn, are often regarded as forerunners of the journalism of the future (Knight, 2015). Loosen, Reimer, and De Silva-Schmidt (2017) argue that data journalism is commonly carried out by cross-disciplinary teams that have divided the labor into data analysis, visualization and writing. When professionals and non-professionals produce news together in this manner, they are engaging in what Belair-Gagnon

and Holton (2018) define as boundary maintenance (news production) around a boundary object (news). Researchers have described the professionals traditionally outside of journalism who are interacting at this boundary as interlopers or actors at the periphery of journalism (e.g., Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Cheruiyot, Baack, & Ferrer-Conill, 2019; Eldridge, 2018). According to Carlson (2016), these boundaries provide shared ways of understanding news work, and the metajournalistic discourse that arises from these collaborations may challenge how news is produced and consumed.

Previous research on news sites born online have focused on stand-alone sites with a direct audience (e.g., Bruno & Kleis Nielsen, 2012). In this study, we aim to explore how digital news initiatives that act as an intermediary between data and legacy media could also be part of the digital native ecosystem. Such news start-ups publish content and journalistic products, but not with the intention to attract an audience. Rather, the intention is similar to that of the larger non-profit news organizations around the world, such as ProPublica or the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which is to attract new collaborations with the media and through these collaborations republish the news to a wider audience (Konieczna & Powers, 2017).

This exploratory study revolves around a case featuring two such digital native news start-ups: Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy. These companies share founders and employees and have overlapping aims of harnessing data at the periphery of traditional journalism. While Journalism ++ Stockholm mainly produces traditional data journalism on commission for legacy media, Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy focuses on automating parts of the data journalistic working process, i.e., the collection and refinement of public data, and provides analyses of data as short reports for both journalistic and non-journalistic purposes.

Hermida and Young (2019) assert that a key for future research is to gauge who matters in journalism based on qualities other than traditional ones (p. 99). Thus, the narrow focus on two individuals in this case study can be motivated by their central status as journalism innovators in Sweden and the Nordic countries. Furthermore, in his seminal work on news automation, Diakopoulos (2019) frames these two start-ups as groundbreaking in an international comparison as well.

Much of recent scholarship on innovation in journalism revolves around boundary work, where new actors enter journalism as peripheral actors (Powers & Zambrano, 2016; Usher, 2017) or engage with journalists as in the case of the entanglements of civic tech and data journalism (Cheruiyot et al., 2019). This qualitative case study is based on an analysis of blog posts and interviews over time with the start-up founders. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on peripheral actors in journalism by exploring digital natives who do not have a direct audience and apply a reversed perspective, thus presenting a story of journalists who work at the periphery of legacy media and use journalistic thinking outside of journalistic contexts.

In the following sections, we will briefly review the literature on digital news start-ups and relate data journalism to a subsection of the discussion on peripheral actors in journalism. We will then present the methods, material and motivating questions for the study, followed by our results. We conclude with a discussion and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

In this case study of two news start-ups, we focus on individuals who drive innovation and entrepreneurship in journalism from the periphery. Thus, the selected literature review is based on studies of entrepreneurial journalism, data journalism and peripheral actors, as well as factors of success in digital news start-ups.

2.1. The Rise and Success of Digital News Start-Ups

The literature on digital news start-ups revolves around start-ups producing journalism for a direct audience. In a report on such news start-ups in western Europe, Bruno and Kleis Nielsen (2012) found that online start-ups begin as journalistic and are driven by both professional and commercial ambitions. They tend to diversify their revenues by experimenting with activities that traditionally have not been associated with journalism, such as content syndication, e-commerce, advertorials, consultancy work, events planning or reader donations (p. 96). The scholarly discussion links this development of experimentation with new technologies and challenging of boundaries for what is considered journalism to the downsizing of the media industry. In this context, downsizing has had a positive effect by encouraging journalists to start their own businesses and propose their own journalistic innovations (Cohen, 2015; Raviola, 2019; Tenor, 2019). Cook and Sirkkunen (2015) divided digital native start-up sites into two categories: storytelling and service-orientation. Storytelling sites provide news to a direct audience, and service-oriented sites consist of online media actors that focus on elements of journalism rather than content creation. The revenue streams for service-oriented sites are not based on advertising models but rather on a wider strategy to sell products as part of a complex relationship with mainstream media (Cook & Sirkkunen, 2015, p. 73). Thus, previously unthreatened boundaries between journalistic and business-oriented functions are dissolving, often rhetorically motivated by survival and an industry crisis (Coddington, 2015). However, the change may not be that drastic. Naldi and Picard (2012) argue that entrepreneurs bring "formal myopia" into their new enterprise, which means their previous experiences and perceptions affect their assessments. Formal myopia, according to Naldi and Picard (2012, p. 77), influences initial thinking and choices of news start-up founders, thus limiting innovation and creating additional obsta-

cles to their success. However, Wagemans, Witschge, and Deuze (2016) argue that a strong belief in the core values of journalism, such as maintaining a professional identity, may not necessarily obstruct the development of new forms of entrepreneurial journalism; in fact, it can be the main selling point.

Some digital natives have been associated with counter information as a way to promote social change in societies facing democratic challenges and low confidence in the media (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). There are also digital natives that focus on investigative journalism without distinct political or activist aims (Nee, 2013). Furthermore, there are non-profit digital news start-ups have emerged alongside market-driven online natives (e.g., in the US). Wagemans et al. (2016) found that French journalism start-ups are often inspired by US businesses that strive for fact-based, objective journalism. Similarly, for Nordic journalists, US journalism often serves as inspiration. There is a long history of the Americanization of European journalism, for example with norms, routines, and textual conventions previously being adapted to European national contexts (Broersma, 2019). However, Örnebring (2009) argues that, in a Nordic context, "Americanization is largely confined to news format, not news content" (p. 11).

Wagemans et al. (2016) note that most start-ups fail despite good intentions. One explanation for this could be that founders tend to primarily focus on developing their editorial model and spend little time to focus on revenues during the first few years (Naldi & Picard, 2012). In the case of journalistic start-ups, perceived success has been tied to the ability to offer quality content (Pekkala & Cook, 2012). To secure outreach, the start-ups also define success in terms of community, public service and survival rather than money. Therefore, Naldi and Picard (2012, p. 90) use a three-dimensional definition of initial success: 1) ability to attain original expectations, 2) capacity to change the business model, and 3) probability of survival (sustainability). Similarly, Bruno and Kleis Nielsen (2012) argue that a measure of success for digital news start-ups is mere survival. However, the ability to survive can be explained by the ability to deliver a distinct, quality product, operate with a lean organization, have diverse revenues, and target niche audiences that are poorly served by existing media (p. 6).

2.2. Data Journalism as a Form of Entrepreneurial Journalism

Cheruiyot et al. (2019) argue that data journalism is not a purely "journalistic" phenomenon because it is associated with peripheral actors who in various ways complement or expand the work journalists do (p. 2). For example, Nordic data journalists connect with each other through social media, such as the Facebook group "Datajournalistik," at conferences focused on data and journalism (Appelgren, 2016). In Europe, data journalism has been shaped by institutional factors, such as the digitization of public records. These records are increasingly accessible via Application Programming Interface (API) mandated by the PSI Directive (Appelgren & Nygren, 2014) and the increasing supply of tools for collecting, analyzing, and visualizing data. Stalph and Borges-Rey (2018) assert that data journalism has become an asset within legacy organizations over the past decade. However, in this context, the nearby metaphor "robot journalism" has proved to have negative, almost existential, connotations (Lindén & Dierickx, 2019; Willis, 2020).

Based on previous research on boundary work in science, Carlson (2015) suggests a matrix to situate individual studies of boundary work in journalism. The model is based on studies of the separate lines between journalists and non-journalists. In a typical study of participants that move across Carlson's suggested categories of expansion, expulsion, and protection of autonomy, Baack (2018) found that data journalists and other professionals, such as interloping newcomers (e.g., civic technologists), engage in communities of practice, meaning that individuals rarely revolve around sustained and institutionalized engagement (p. 676).

While previous studies on entrepreneurial journalism have focused on pioneering forms of journalism in newsrooms, they have somewhat neglected individual pioneering journalists (Hepp & Loosen, 2019, p. 2). Similarly, even though data journalism is carried out in teams, there is little research on individual data journalists as pioneers. Pioneering journalists have been found to perceive themselves as forerunners who can act as intermediaries and bring together various competencies (Hepp & Loosen, 2019), and the ideal entrepreneurial journalist as embodied in the entrepreneurial discourse is an individual who creates new media products, disrupts traditional media organizations, and generates capital, new products, and even jobs for other journalists (Cohen, 2012, p. 524). In this context, there is an imperative to strive towards upgrading one's own skills, in particular concerning technology and self-promotion. Summarizing the scholarly research on data journalism, Loosen et al. (2017, p. 3) find that scholars are debating if and to what extent data journalism is actually a new reporting style, but the skills of the "technical journalist," such as programming and data journalism, are currently upgrading journalism (Bakker, 2014).

3. Background and Motivating Questions

In this section, we will briefly introduce the Nordic media market and provide the background on the two start-ups. We will then present the motivating questions for the case study.

The media ecosystem in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark has been labelled the Nordic welfare state media model (Syvertsen, Mjøs, Enli, & Moe, 2014). It is characterized by strong public service and decentralized press, with a lot of local and regional newspapers (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Social media platforms, and

Facebook in particular, have recently become the most frequent source of news for people in this region (Olsen, Solvoll, & Gran, 2018), but there are signs of a general trend away from dependence on platforms (Lindén, 2020). Legacy media is struggling with its business model, but the larger commercial media companies, such as Bonnier, Schibsted, Sanoma and Amedia, are successfully transitioning from mixed revenues—advertisement and subscriptions—to paid digital content (Villi et al., 2019).

The first start-up, Journalism ++ Stockholm, was founded by Swedish-Finnish journalist Jens Finnäs and Swedish journalist Peter Grensund in 2013 (Andén, 2013) in Stockholm. It was part of the European Journalism++ network with chapters in Paris, Berlin, Stockholm, Porto, Amsterdam, and Cologne. Later, the Nordic agency added three new employees. The larger European Journalism++ network was founded in 2011 by Nicolas Kayser-Bril, Pierre Romera, and Anne-Lise Bouyer (Kayser-Bril, 2017). The most famous work from this network was the award-winning project "The Migrants' Files". The European network Journalism++ coordinated this groundbreaking project, which aimed to measure the number of people who died while trying to reach Europe, between 2013 and 2016 (The Migrants' Files, 2014). The network shrank to only two chapters in 2017: Stockholm and Porto.

The second start-up, Journalism Robotics, was first described in 2016 as the product Newsworthy, and later presented as a separate company, Journalism Robotics. Newsworthy is described as a "machine that will find news in data" (Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy, 2020).

J++ Stockholm has been active in the global open-source movement, sharing software code and practices on platforms such as GitHub. Furthermore, it attended key data journalism conferences and seminars, not just in Sweden and Nordic countries but also internationally, such as the European gathering Dataharvest and the US NICAR and Computation + Journalism Symposium conferences. With the emergence of artificial intelligence in journalism, the news media is becoming increasingly dependent on technical expertise (Beckett, 2019), and helping newsrooms understand and make use of technology to produce various forms of data-driven journalism is at the center of the J++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy business model. In order to explore how the start-ups negotiated their area of expertise in data journalism over time as they develop the company and their skills, we use two motivational questions: 1) "What are the aims and target groups, i.e., customers, for the two news start-ups?"; and 2) "How do the founders of the news start-ups define their success and failure in navigating the boundaries between journalism and technology?"

4. Methods and Material

This case study is based on a qualitative content analysis of blog posts from the J++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy websites and a series of semi-structured interviews with the main founder, Jens Finnäs, and a cofounder, Måns Magnusson, of two news start-ups, Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy.

Case study research is an empirical process that investigates a contemporary phenomenon, and it is iterative in nature (Yin, 2014). Bryman (2008) argues that it is not always possible to discern the case study type until after a detailed investigation. However, because the case selected for this study is an example of the more general case of a peripheral actor in journalism in the Nordics, we believe that it can be viewed as what Yin (2014) referred to as a representative case.

The interviews with the two founders were conducted in Stockholm and Helsinki, respectively, on November 24, 2016, August 9, 2017, and March 15, November 8, and November 11, 2019. The interviews lasted around 40–50 min each. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic and inductive qualitative text analysis approach, where careful reading of transcripts has formed the motivating questions that structure the article. This method has been applied in a flexible way, taking into account the nuances and diversity of the responses. The researchers are positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the text analysis is grounded in the subjective meaning of human action, thus preserving the interviewees' subjective point of view (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

To ensure validity, we showed the informants the results of the interview study and corrected any misunderstandings. The corrections were mainly about the order of events in time, the narrative of leaving journalism behind, and the labelling of the companies and products as start-ups. Because the material mainly relates to specific circumstances regarding a small number of individuals, we applied an idiographic approach to the analysis (Bryman, 2008).

For the content analysis, we collected the blog posts available on both companies' web pages. In total, Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy created 23 blog posts between June 2, 2015 and October 16, 2019 (18 and 5, respectively). The majority of Journalism ++ Stockholm's posts were written by two authors: nine by Jens Finnäs, seven by Leo Wallentin, and the remainder by other staff members. The Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy posts do not include bylines. When coding, the researcher looked for the process of narration in the material, i.e., how the information was offered, withheld or delayed (Gillespie, 2006), or how the company positioned and described itself and its development. We decided to use a qualitative content analysis of company blog posts, where one of the researchers first coded for specific themes in the textual content (data journalism, investigative journalism, technology, non-journalistic practices, success, failure, companies and organizations) and then looked for how these

themes were narrated when promoting the company's aims and activities.

We regard the Journalism ++ Stockholm blog posts as "physical traces of how organizations represent and account for themselves" (Coffey, 2014, p. 367), and the purpose has been to gather information about "sense-making practices" (McKee, 2003, p. 52). The material was read several times and coded (Bryman, 2008). After the initial coding, we found that the blog posts illustrated company development by accounting for the company's activities over time. The results from the content analysis follow the motivating questions and are organized in terms of the intention and language for whom the content was created and for what purpose, as well as the cultural resources the stories draw on and what they aim to accomplish with the stories (Riessman, 1993). All quotes are translated from Swedish.

5. Results

In this section, we will present the results from the content analysis of blog posts and the interviews with the founders of the two digital journalism start-ups.

5.1. Results from the Content Analysis of Blog Posts

An overview of the two blogs forming the basis for the content analysis shows that they utilize different styles. The Journalism ++ Stockholm blog has a personal tone and uses colloquial language with a rich flora of data journalism terms that might be new to non-data journalists. Instead, the Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy blog primarily addresses non-journalists and promotes Newsworthy as a product. However, there are similarities between the blogs in terms of rhetoric. Both blogs frequently use questions at the beginning of texts and paragraphs. Statistics and results from analyses are presented with dialogical language, referring to the reader as "you" and the writer together with the reader as "we," thus guiding the reader in a personal style through complex descriptions of data journalism methods. Both blogs contain images and graphics primarily for the purpose of illustrating relationships found in data.

The first motivational question of our study, as presented earlier, relates to the aims and target groups. We found that the blog posts accounts for company aims by describing development related to data journalism competence and skills. Target groups are mentioned in examples of collaborations with media companies or non-journalistic organizations. Several narratives illustrate the founders' experiences of becoming more skilled at data journalism and developing their company ideas. We therefore begin this section by presenting three quotes that are particularly illustrative of how the company positions itself using personal examples and nestled promotional stories. The first quote provides a historical account of how Journalism ++ Stockholm first was established:

> Four years ago, Jens Finnäs and Peter Grensund received an offer they couldn't refuse: an opportunity to join the Journalism ++ network. They founded Journalism ++ Stockholm and became part of an international network of agencies dedicated to data-driven journalism and newsroom innovation. (Finnäs, 2017)

This quote illustrates how the two journalists entered the international network of data journalists as a successful strategic move. The blog post continues by praising the competence in the international Journalism ++ network, but its main purpose is to mention that key members of the international Journalism ++ network are leaving. This is carefully explained so that it does not seem as if this will do any harm to those remaining in the Journalism ++ network. The blog post then explains that a smaller network will lead to a new exciting era with opportunities to tighten collaborations and become even stronger at producing data journalism.

In the second quote, the presented narrative not only describes the journalistic experience, but functions as a suggestion and an argument for why 'robot journalism,' the main business model of Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy, is valuable to news organizations:

> I began my career as a journalist at the local newspaper Nya Åland. It is not uncommon for local news reporters to feel a bit like a robot. Rewriting police telefax statements as news items about speeding was not very intellectually stimulating. Why couldn't a news robot have done this job? (Finnäs, 2015b)

This quote is followed by calculations of costs that are possible to cut in the newsroom, thus clearly targeting journalists in charge of media houses. The quote aims to motivate senior journalists now in management positions to invest in news automation technology to eliminate mundane tasks. However, in several posts, the start-up founders make it clear that they are not interested in discussing job cuts and replacing journalists with software, but rather the possibilities presented by new technology. The presented experience the founders acquired from having a full career, from the mundane and simple tasks at the junior level as in the quote above, to the present, where expertise in programming makes it possible to reduce such tasks, still implicitly indicates that the mundane experience has been valuable.

The third quote focuses on experience, and is found in the beginning of a Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy blog post on how to create graphs:

> I have been the leader of courses and workshops on how to visualize and tell stories with data intended for journalists and Public Relations professionals for more than ten years. What should you bear in mind when you create a graph? What is the secret behind good data visualization? Here, I have tried

> to reduce everything I have learned in three steps. (Newsworthy, 2019a)

The post appears to be about presenting useful information in graphs, but it implicitly promotes both the Newsworthy product, which provides analytics as data, and the competence of the product's creators. The promotional examples given in the post are primarily non-journalistic and use personal pronouns: "Sales have gone down since *we* changed *our* CEO, or housing prices in *our* municipality are up" (Newsworthy, 2019a). Furthermore, the signal to the reader is that they might not be competent enough in creating graphs. This is visible in other blog posts as well, for example by referring to the audience as having no time for developing skills or journalists notoriously being bad at math. While the quote above is rather humble, the style quickly changes in the blog post. The insights gained from ten years of teaching visualization are summarized as what most journalists do wrong, rather than what journalists can do right, and the author's tone can be interpreted as annoyed or even superior:

> This is by far the most important step. Let me clarify: The most I-M-P-O-R-T-A-N-T. (Newsworthy, 2019a)

The second motivational question of our study is related to critical factors for success. The blog posts discuss the company's success by listing successful projects. On rare occasions, successes are described explicitly, but not by the authors themselves. For example, the following is a press release that indicates success through the quote of a new employee:

> This is very exciting! Newsworthy and J++ [Stockholm] are among Sweden's most innovative media players. (Newsworthy, 2019b)

The post continues with quotes from the founders about how happy they are that the group will now be able to carry out even more skilled data journalistic tasks. Other posts include comments from previous course attendees praising the teaching and what they have learned by attending Journalism ++ Stockholm courses.

The general finding from the analysis of blog posts, however, is that the focus is not on explicit success but rather on presenting the methodology behind successful projects. There is a strong emphasis on the difficulties each project faced. Thus, success is primarily narrated as being transparent with learning new things, as captured in the following quote:

> One of our internal goals at J++ [Stockholm] is for us to work with aspects that are new to us in all our projects. There has to be something innovative in the genre or something that we ourselves have not yet mastered. (Wallentin, 2015)

The tension between technology and journalism and the applied journalistic thinking to non-journalistic areas was visible in the blog posts. We found that substantial effort was made to put future 'robot journalism' in a positive light, listing strengths such as efficiency, endurance and ability to avoid human error. The 'robots' are said to be better at judging quality, for example when interpreting statistics.

In a blog post aimed at promoting an early version of Journalism Newsworthy by describing how 'robot journalism' works, a timeframe is used to impress journalists. Two hours after a public agency releases data, a news automation tool will have analyzed the published data and created 311 reports. In other words, the impossible is now possible. The blog post continues by describing how this process is effortless, as results "drop in from all over the country." This process is also enjoyable:

> We have not only written 1,244 reports (with only two people at the wheel), but we have also created a machine that can create 1,244 reports while we are having a cup of coffee. (Finnäs, 2018)

In this context, mentioning the coffee break signals that it is possible to get large amounts of work done while taking a break. Again, the impossible is now possible. While the blog posts also state that additional human competence is needed to carry out journalistic tasks, and that humans are shaping technological processes, for example that humans have written the news automation software, 'robots' are nevertheless presented as living beings with feelings:

> Carrying out repetitive tasks are one of robot journalism's primary strengths. For the robot, it does not matter if it will get an assignment to write one police report or a thousand. It is just as happy. (Finnäs, 2015b)

Gradually, blog posts increasingly contain non-journalistic examples. Results, or rather methodology behind projects in collaboration with public agencies and unions, shape the message to appeal more to professional but possibly non-journalistic target audiences. Yet the reader is constantly reminded that the products and expertise can be used for journalistic purposes:

> Newsworthy started as an initiative for helping local journalists find news in data. Now, we are obviously also helping elected members in the Teachers' Union understand their world with data….In our news service Newsworthy, we try to build a machine that can answer these questions *en masse* for different types of data. If you just keep the questions at the back of your head the next time you present numbers to your boss, you will have a much better shot at making your voice heard. (Newsworthy, 2019c)

5.2. Results from the Qualitative Interviews with the Start-Up Founders

This section summarizes the interviews with the two founders and is structured around the two motivational questions. The first motivational question, as presented above, concerns the aims and target groups for the two news start-ups. In a report written by Jens Finnäs, he defines the start-up's aim as follows:

> The ambition is to be the leading data journalism freelance agency in Scandinavia, an actor that newsrooms across the Nordic countries can turn to for assistance in data-driven reporting. (Finnäs, 2015a)

In essence, this is the definition of a service provider, and this aim is also reflected in the company's blog posts through their emphasis on describing competence and data journalism methodology. Finnäs explained the logic of the two different corporate structures as two commercial operations with slightly different focuses. According to Finnäs (personal communication, November 11, 2019), Journalism ++ Stockholm is a consultancy firm that helps media companies with various journalistic projects and also trains reporters in data journalism, while Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy has a broader user group, including people in public relations and communication. According to Finnäs, the infrastructure for local content can easily be turned into press releases, personalized emails, or PowerPoint presentations as well as articles.

While the aim of Journalism ++ Stockholm and the reasons for starting the network were explicit in the analyzed blog posts, the interviews revealed that the idea behind Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy emerged from a friendship with statistician Måns Magnusson. Initially, Finnäs had been a freelance data journalist and explored how open public data sources could be used for journalism. Finnäs was friends with a statistics PhD student, Måns Magnusson, who was focusing on machine learning. They were both inspired by US statistician Nate Silver and his start-up FiveThirtyEight, which uses statistical analysis to tell compelling stories.

Before receiving his PhD degree, Magnusson worked as a statistician for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, a popular data source among Swedish data journalists. Magnusson and Finnäs started collaborating professionally, one focusing on hardcore data mining and the other on searching for interesting data that could be used and visualized in journalistic projects. In 2016, their collaboration resulted in Journalism Robotics, which developed news automation services under the brand name Newsworthy. Magnusson (personal communication, November 8, 2019) described the service as "computational storyfinding, going through large amounts of data with statistical methods, finding a needle in the haystack." Jens Finnäs asserts that the start-up's journalistic logic of working with structured data is appealing to more than just journalists:

> Newsworthy adjusts created texts to local contexts and patterns to create a sophisticated software pipeline that autonomously generates texts with very little human effort in terms of adjusting content. We are building the infrastructure to create local content…providing 300 different local news angles instead of one national angle. (Finnäs, personal communication, November 11, 2019)

Apart from producing news content on commission for larger Nordic news organizations, the company also applied for funding from non-profit organizations and foundations, although projects funded in this manner generally were terminated once the funding was gone. One example of this was a project to develop a data mining system for a large newspaper in Tampere, Finland, that failed to gain acceptance in the newsroom. The failure of technology adoptions in newsrooms is a common thread in research (Wagemans & Witschge, 2019).

When the Google-funded Digital News Initiative (DNI) started in 2015, Finnäs and Magnusson decided to apply for funding. They received funding for an idea of news automation based on data sets from Statistics Sweden, a government agency that produces and publishes official statistics. In interviews, Finnäs describes this moment as a defining and critical success factor for the company, and the idea developed into the start-up news service Newsworthy. Overall, Google has been a crucial supporter of data journalism and media innovation (Fanta, 2018; Lindén, 2020). In 2016, Magnusson and Finnäs were involved in an incubator program managed by the Swedish innovation agency Vinnova. This project was plagued by communication problems and what was perceived as less-than-helpful advice: "Don't get me started on that," Magnusson said afterwards (personal communication, November 8, 2019). The main problem was that the funding from this program could not be used to develop their current business model; rather, it could only be used to develop some kind of tangible product. Finnäs and Magnusson struggled to find a solution that Vinnova was willing to fund, and they were asked to "think outside the box" and "be brave." Ultimately, they received no funding.

Reflecting on the project funded by DNI, Finnäs (personal communication, November 11, 2019) believes that they were doing things quite differently today compared to their original pitch. Newsworthy's main function was supposed to be to provide local newsrooms with unique content, and more specifically localized news snippets. Because of the lack of commercial interest among Swedish newsrooms, though, they decided to broaden its services to other customers. Newsworthy landed new customers outside of journalism, such as the Swedish teachers' union, *Lärarförbundet*.

The second motivating question of this study, as presented above, is related to perceived success and failure.

A key part of the perceived success has been to educate journalists and take part in conferences. According

to Finnäs, "Through all these workshops, we have seen that the data skills and Excel skills are very, very low" (personal communication, November 11, 2019). Finnäs has also held a key role in the Nordic Data Journalism Conference and built the repository for entries to NODA Awards as part of attracting new collaborations: "Conferences have been totally invaluable for finding coworkers and customers. For me personally, everything can be traced back to some conference" (Finnäs, personal communication, November 11, 2019).

Finnäs accounts the failures to a lack of interest for the Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy product. The perceived non-response from newsrooms to their offer was disappointing, especially since Finnäs is confident that the tool could help overcome structural obstacles in editorial routines for an industry in which both money and time are scarce.

We found in the interviews that the founders primarily told stories about designing and building the systems, but they somewhat neglected their strategies for addressing target groups to be successful. Finnäs is self-critical when he reflects on how to get people already struggling with information overflow to listen and accept that even more new information could be useful:

> The challenge is not technical, more like organizational. Looking at municipalities, we need to know who will gain and in what way? What are their roles, are they bureaucrats or elected? What topics are interesting and relevant and where do they get their information today? (Finnäs, personal communication, November 11, 2019)

Magnusson is more optimistic, asserting that the low level of interest is only temporary and Newsworthy will be able to focus on journalistic services in the future:

> Since the amount of available data is quickly growing, interesting stories will drown in an unmanageable mass of information. With the help of machine-learning tools such as Newsworthy, journalists can build systems that go through massive amounts of data to find both anomalies and large societal trends. (Magnusson, personal communication, November 8, 2019)

6. Conclusions

Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy are well-known in the Nordic media market and viewed as pioneers driving change in Nordic news innovation. As such, they are examples of non-traditional actors that matter in journalism (Hermida & Young, 2019). Yet, in this case study, we have found that the company founders are now strategically moving towards non-journalistic customers. With this study, we aim to expand the digital native news start-up research by exploring two digital natives without a direct audience that are working at the periphery of the legacy media, successfully managing to apply journalistic thinking outside of journalistic contexts.

Two motivational questions guided us through our exploration of the digital journalism start-ups' journey. The first motivating question concerned aims and target groups for the two start-ups.

Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy initially were examples of what Cook and Sirkkunen (2015) denoted as service-oriented digital native sites; they focused on elements of data journalism and had a strategy to sell products to legacy media. In line with García-Avilés et al. (2019) and Bruno and Kleis Nielsen (2012), we also found that they offer alternative products, such as organizing events, and they diversify their revenues with consultancy work and content syndication. To face economic realities, Journalism ++ Stockholm and Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy have gradually become more flexible in terms of their focus on data journalism as a service for legacy media and successfully attracted a few non-journalistic customers.

The founders have not put much effort into researching the needs of either their journalistic or non-journalistic target groups. However, interviews and company blog posts reveal that the founders are very knowledgeable about what can be done with data in a journalistic setting and how to create quality content, an important presumption for news start-up success (Pekkala & Cook, 2012). There is also evidence that they have mastered how to collect and structure data, for example by offering transparent explanations of methodologies, but we did not find explicit offers for attracting customers to the Newsworthy product. The absence of a customer needs analysis beyond the news production process might be an example of what Naldi and Picard (2012) denote as "formal myopia," thus restricting innovation and development beyond the competences and experiences that the founders brought with them into the companies.

The second motivational question revolves around how the companies define their success and failure in navigating the boundaries between journalism and technology.

We argue that the decision to continue with the operations, despite the failure of the larger European J++ network, shows that mere survival, as suggested by Bruno and Kleis Nielsen (2012), was a factor of success. However, training journalists with computational skills has probably been the most important success factor for J++ Stockholm, establishing their competence niche in data journalism. Furthermore, throughout the company's existence, it has successfully produced data journalism for several newsrooms across Scandinavia on commission. This is in line with how Wagemans et al. (2016) argues that core values of journalism and maintaining the professional identity can be part of the main selling point for new forms of entrepreneurial journalism. In general, however, we found that Journalism ++

Stockholm expresses success in a quite negative manner. However, explaining gained insights in blog posts as overcoming failures, a transparent way of expressing skill development may be well-suited to attract data journalistic projects on commission. Traditional media companies were willing to pay the founders for their freelance data journalism content and data journalism training courses in a traditional buyer–seller relationship.

However, we found that the Nordic media companies were reluctant to invest in journalistic products, such as Newsworthy. We argue that the strong emphasis on the contested metaphor 'robot journalism' in the promotional discourse could have been an obstacle. Robot journalism is associated with job loss and thus brings negative connotations to newsroom staff (Lindén & Dierickx, 2019), furthermore, robots are portrayed as more than just automation of mundane tasks, and may thus appear threatening. Therefore, even though journalism forms the basis of the two start-ups, the Journalism Robotics/Newsworthy product, with its emphasis on robotics, may have appeared as challenging, presenting contradictory definitions of the profession (Eldridge, 2018). When trying to sell the product as technology-enhancing journalism, the founders move from the buyer-seller relationship between journalists, as seen when selling data journalism projects on commission, to outsiders, i.e., interloping actors (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018). With the narratives of efficiency and automation, a competing narrative is provided. Reluctance could thus be an example of how legacy media protects autonomy by fending off non-journalists seeking control or who aim to shape journalism (Carlson, 2015).

To conclude, our case study shows that the two start-ups engage heavily in developing technology skills and use the blogs for self-promotion in a manner typical of entrepreneurial journalists (Cohen, 2012). They found a successful narrative to attract data journalistic work on commission acting as journalists, yet become outsiders when selling their product Newsworthy to legacy media. They master the advantage of what Carlson (2016) describes as the metajournalistic discourse regarding cooperation between journalists and technologists by transparently describing failures and methodological challenges in data journalism in their promotional blog posts. However, they have yet to learn how to identify customer needs and communicate what the product can offer in a manner that is appealing to both journalistic and non-journalistic customers. Nevertheless, they attract non-journalistic customers.

Future research could investigate if this type of promotional communication needs to be formulated differently in order to sell the product in non-journalistic contexts and at the same time appeal to the professional logic of journalism. Perhaps the core issue in selling the product Newsworthy is not the fault of the two start-ups, but rather highlights the shortcomings of legacy media to understand why and how they also need to cooperate with peripheral actors.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Journalism Expands in Spite of the Crisis: Digital-Native News Media in Spain

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Abstract
Digital-native news organizations have grown steadily in Spain since the mid-1990s and they have become established as a major force in the media market. Paradoxically, their biggest expansion coincided with the Great Recession (2008–2014). In fact, their numbers increased most during 2012–2013, when traditional media were cutting staff in response to the economic crisis, and unemployment rates in the media sector as a whole hit their peak. However, these digital-native news startups have yet to prove their sustainability and stability. This study uses our own database of 3,862 native and non-native digital news outlets in Spain and the Reuters Institute Digital News Report to analyze a number of characteristics of these media, such as the percentage that have gone inactive, the relative popularity of legacy brands vs. digital natives, multi-platform synergies, content subject matter, geographical location, ownership, and funding sources. Based on these quantitative parameters, this study reviews the structural strengths and weaknesses of digital-native media in the Spanish news market. Taking into account these findings, we conclude that the surge in digital-native news media observed in Spain during the Great Recession followed the pattern of creative destruction described by several economists.

Keywords
digital journalism; digital-native media; media economics; online news; Spain

Issue
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1. Introduction

Digital journalism is entering its third decade in Spain, and the industry and the way people consume news is changing faster than ever. Since their inception in the middle of the 1990s, online properties rooted in traditional or legacy media dominated the digital market; nevertheless, digital-native media have advanced to a key position in the reconfiguring of the media ecosystem (Salaverría, 2019). The purpose of this study is to review the structural strengths and weaknesses of digital-native media in the Spanish news market by looking at the number and the types of sites emerging from the Great Recession.

In 2019, digital-born media made up 46.4% of all active digital publications in this country, according to our research, and they represented an expanding, diversified, and developed sector, building on the trend signaled in previous studies (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa, & Breiner, 2018). Besides increasing and broadening the supply of content, digital-native media have gained more followers every year: When asked about the kinds of media they used weekly for news, 21% of adult online news users in Spain said they used digital-native sites and apps.

When asked about news brands of all kinds, 57% of users remembered having used a digital-native news brand in the last week and such use was highest among young people (see Table 1).

This growth in the demand and supply of digital-native media in Spain is occurring in a financial and political environment that makes it hard for digital media to survive. The first decade of the millennium was "one of creative destruction in the news industry across Western Europe" (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012, p. 3), that was "dismantling the traditional financial media configurations" (Picard, 2014, p. 273). Spain was no exception and the economic crisis accentuated the erosion of the media model with years of decline in sales and advertising (Salaverría & Gómez-Baceiredo, 2017).

The economic revitalization that followed those years of crisis in Spain generated an improvement in the general media situation with new investments (de Toro et al., 2017, pp. 21–25). Nevertheless, political action at a national level ground to a halt, with no stable majorities in Parliament, four general elections in four years, and in 2019 the economy slowed down.

Paradoxically, despite this uncertain context, the number of digital-native media has increased, driven by technology and audience demand. These emerging media in many cases have become leading innovators in production and narrative forms, thus improving the quality of content (García-Avilés & González-Esteban, 2012).

The business of media is changing, too, but not at the pace that some expected. For the moment, neither legacy media nor digital-native media can do without advertising or choose to close off their online editions with paywalls entirely. In 2018, the Spanish press generated 486,9 million euros in traditional advertising, a decline of 6.8% year-on-year. But that reduced total is still more than their combined digital ad revenue of 319,9 million euros, which grew by 15.8% over the previous year. Nor can digital-native media manage without advertising: In 2018, they received 205 million euros from that source, up 9.5% from the previous year (Asociación de Medios de la Información de España, 2019).

At the same time, some digital-native operations are complementing advertising with user revenue. They focus on building the size and loyalty of their audience with unique content that people will be willing to pay for. In some cases, a media organization with free content asks users to make a voluntary payment—a one-off donation or a membership with recurring fee—to support quality, independent journalism (González-Esteban, 2014). In other cases, they establish a metered paywall that grants users access to a limited number of articles before requiring them to pay, or they restrict access to more distinctive or exclusive content. In all cases, the user's willingness to pay is based on the media organization's developing a relationship of trust and service with the audience.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Digital-Native News Media and Creative Destruction

Since Schumpeter (1942) popularized it, the concept of creative destruction has been one of the most used since the mid-twentieth century to describe the processes of change in any industry of the market economy. This concept describes the innovation process under which new products that are launched to the market tend to destroy established companies and their business models. The theory of creative destruction proposed by the Austrian economist has gained special prominence in the last quarter of the century with the digital economy, where new actors have destabilized not only some companies—there are well known cases such as Kodak and Blockbuster (Foster & Kaplan, 2011; Gershon, 2013)—but even complete industries, such as music (Ku, 2002). The news media industry has been another clear example of this process (Schlesinger & Doyle, 2015).

Since the 1990s, new actors have burst into the legacy media industry whose competition, at first, was undervalued by many media managers. For example, the renowned media analyst Howard Kurtz (2002) in *The Washington Post* used these deprecatory words to describe the search engine that was to become the main competitor of the media in the following decade: "Google is a mere conveyor belt that delivers all kinds of info-matter without the slightest judgment." In effect, the new actors—technology providers, search engines, online stores, social networks—were frequently considered as mere outsiders of the journalistic business, not direct competitors of traditional media. However, in the emerging attention economy, the downturn of the legacy media caused by these successful internet start-ups—Apple, Google, Amazon, Facebook—soon revealed their profound and long-lasting disruptive effect. Confirming Schumpeter's theory, the creativity and innovation of the new competitors triggered a process of rapid destruction of legacy media companies (Pérez-Latre, 2014).

Table 1. Kinds of brands used for checking the news online in the last week (N = 2005, January 17–February 21, 2019).

Kinds of online media brands	Total	Men	Women	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Print-native	69%	73%	65%	75%	73%	74%	66%	65%	66%
Broadcast-native	60%	62%	58%	61%	64%	61%	59%	59%	56%
Digital-native	57%	58%	55%	67%	66%	61%	53%	51%	48%

Note: Question: "Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply." Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2019, conducted by YouGov (Vara-Miguel, Negredo, Amoedo, & Moreno, 2019).

To stand up to the new competitors, news media companies have developed different innovation strategies, with different outcomes. The most widespread and common strategy has been multi-platform diversification (Doyle, 2013), frequently guided by consulting companies that oriented media companies in their strategic decision-making. In other cases, news media companies have tested internal innovation strategies, such as creating laboratories for technological development, developing new storytelling formats, and exploring new business models (Salaverría, 2015). Some newspaper companies have also experimented with intrapreneurship, by sponsoring start-ups, thus emulating their powerful digital competitors (Boyles, 2016; Hass, 2011). The truth, however, is that these measures have barely managed to lessen the devastating impact of large digital companies on the legacy media business.

In recent years, a second wave of creative destruction can be noticed in the media industry. If in the first wave the impact was made by companies coming from outside the news media industry, in this second wave the competitors emerged from journalism itself: digital-native media. Their degree of disruption in the journalism industry seems to be smaller than that of the great internet companies. However, the disruption by digital-native news media is still noticeable (Salles, 2019), even if they play with similar rules and suffer similar problems to those of the legacy media. Like traditional media, digital-native media seek to gain the public's attention and confidence through a quality news service. Once the public's trust is obtained, they aspire to build a sustainable business model, either through advertising, subscriptions, or through other formulas. This is a growing competition, in which traditional media have the advantage of their brand recognition, but where digital-native competitors also have their assets: usually their greater ease of adaptation to the dynamics of the Internet, a closer relationship with the public, and less burdensome production structures (Nee, 2013).

2.2. Great Recession and Digital-Native News Media

Our objective was to explore a somewhat counterintuitive phenomenon: the fact that there was a massive launching of digital-native publications during the Great Recession (Grusky, Western, & Wimer, 2011), which in the case of EU countries occurred during the late 2000s and early 2010s. While in those years almost all European legacy media companies were seriously hurt by the most severe economic crisis in decades, quite surprisingly digital-native news media began to thrive, at least in quantitative terms. This phenomenon was particularly noticeable in the countries most seriously battered by the crisis, like Spain. Why?

Scholars have studied extensively how the news media covered the economic crises (e.g., Arrese & Vara-Miguel, 2016; Boomgaarden, van Spanje, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2011; Vliegenthart & Mena Montes, 2014), but not so much how the crises, more specifically the Great Recession, affected the media (e.g., Almiron & Segovia, 2012). This impact was very noticeable, though.

According to the figures compiled by the Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid (APM, 2015), Spanish media laid off almost 12,000 journalists between 2008 and 2015. Those same years of the crisis saw the closing of 214 magazines, 38 daily newspapers, 12 free newspapers, and three news agencies. This is just a cautious estimation of the devastating effects of the crisis in Spanish media industry, according to the report (APM, 2015, p. 92).

While those legacy media were closing, a countertrend was under way. The APM found that journalists launched 579 news startups in Spain, mostly digital, during that eight-year period. Startups in any industry have a high failure rate, and these were no different. By the end of 2015, a fifth of them had closed, which suggests that many of them had weak fundamentals and were poorly planned (APM, 2015, p. 82).

In line with the theoretical framework and industry context outlined above, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the number of digital-native news sites in Spain develop during the Great Recession?

RQ2: What types of digital-native news media emerged from the Great Recession?

3. Methodology

This study aims to specify the features of the digital news market in Spain; in particular, the contents, mono- or multi-platform nature, geographical location, ownership, and funding sources of digital-native news media, as well as the popularity of the main brands of this kind among online news users, compared with the online reach of legacy media.

Digital-native news media in Spain are described based on our own comprehensive database, which takes the form of a collaborative spreadsheet, with 73 columns for variables, started in 2017, with annual updates. It catalogued 3,862 brands in November 2019. The entries for each digital-native media outlets identified in an earlier study (Salaverría et al., 2018) were updated, in terms of reviewing the status and details of existing cases, and the latest launches were also added and classified.

The searching and coding were performed by a trained team of four senior researchers in the USPRINME (2016–2018) and DIGINATIVEMEDIA (2019–2021) projects, affiliated with this research, with additional support from three students for less than 4% of the entries. The students' coding was later checked and validated by the senior researchers. This team produced over 280,000 data cells, a selection of which have been used for the present study.

Inter-coder reliability test results are not available because coding decisions were easily observable by looking

for specific elements designated in the coding procedure for each variable, and they did not require the coder's interpretation. In order to maximize the accuracy and the currentness of the data, in the context of ongoing updates, we developed a codebook that we revised after a pilot study; we conducted peer-to-peer training for each of the coders, and the team maintained fluid communication to solve disputes. At least two different coders reviewed each entry in different moments in time, one of which happened during late 2019.

Sources for the inclusion of media in the database included directories and lists managed by public administrations, industry associations, professional bodies, and others kept by the public, as well as industry news. Whenever an outlet was included, as part of the process of identifying its ownership, other titles from the same publishing house were searched for and added if appropriate. This snowball process was completed with suggested related pages and profiles on social networking sites.

In order to avoid duplication, a search query for the outlet's name and URL was performed before adding any candidate site to the database. Periodical reviews based on alphabetical sorting were conducted, including one right before results were extracted and analyzed. For any duplicates detected, data was consolidated and the redundant instance was deleted before analysis.

The analytical variables relevant for the purpose of this piece of research were: presence or absence of the outlet in web, print, broadcast television, broadcast radio, and mobile application (this gave the sum for multiplatform presence and it was used as the basis for the variable of native or non-native medium); current status (active or inactive, if no content had been published in more than three months or if a previously-registered site ceased to be available); launch date/year and closure date/year (the latter, for inactive media only); general-interest or specialized content scope (for entries classified as specialized, the main content topic and the secondary content topic, following the categories shown in the results section); location at four levels (Autonomous Community/Spanish region, province, municipality, and postcode); public or private ownership; its journalistic or non-journalistic nature, and the presence or absence of seven kinds of funding sources (advertising, sponsored content, subscription, private sponsorship, public sponsorship, donations, and others, which could be specified by coders).

In addition, our database results were compared with the audience performance of digital-native news brands in the Digital News Report survey 2019, conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford and partners such as the University of Navarra for the Spanish market (annual, 2014–2019, N ≈ 2000 yearly). The survey is representative of adults who were connected to the internet and who consumed news at least once in the last month. This method tends to favor websites accessed directly by users, which they are more likely to identify and remember, and it has a detrimental effect on the performance of outlets depending more heavily on social and search as traffic sources, for which the brands may go unnoticed by users. Based on these quantitative parameters, we offer below a review of the structural strengths and weaknesses of digital-native media in the Spanish news market.

4. Results

4.1. The Supply of Digital-Native and Legacy News Media

The 1,382 active digital-native news websites available in Spain in November 2019 are the basis for our detailed study of the sector in this market; these represented 46.4% of all active news sites at the time, considering as 'active' those outlets which had updated their contents at least once in the last three months. We therefore excluded from further analysis the 1,577 active sites that belonged to brands which continued to have a traditional print (newspaper or magazine), broadcasting (either radio or television), or news agency outlet as their main or original news operation, which represented 52.9% of active sites (see Table 2).

Digital-native media constitute a well-developed sector in Spain that has undergone exponential growth: The first comprehensive study counted a mere 116 digital-native news media in 2005 (Salaverría, 2008). If the launch date of the sites is considered, the growth and evolution of digital-native media shows strikingly positive years, against a very bleak economic background, which we will now describe before presenting the data of launches by year.

According to the Economically Active Population Survey from the Spanish Institute for National Statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística* [INE], 2019a), the quantity of unemployed people in the information and communications sector hit 40,000 at the end of 2008, and rose as high as 55,000 in 2012 and 2013. It has descended gradually since, hovering between 24,900 and 36,300.

Table 2. Count of active and inactive, digital-native and non-native online media in Spain (N = 3,862, November 2019).

Status	Digital-native	% by kind	Non-native	% by kind	Not determined	% by kind	Total
Active	1382	79	1577	79.7	20	14.9	2979
Inactive	368	21	401	20.3	114	85.1	883
Total	1750	100	1978	100	134	100	3862

Note: The native or non-native nature of 20 active sites (0.7%) could not be determined. Source: Authors' own database.

Those unemployment figures closely track the country's economy as a whole, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the decade running up to the Great Recession, GDP in Spain grew at annual rates between 2.8% and 5.2%, and it slowed down to a mere 0.9% in 2008. The worst years were 2009, 2012, and 2013, which saw negative growth of −3.7%, −3% and −1.4%, respectively. Since the recovery in 2014 (1.4%), Spanish GDP reached 3.8% in 2015 and it slowed down from 3% in 2016 to 2.4% in 2018 (INE, 2019b).

However, while the economy struggled and unemployment peaked, digital-native launches more than doubled in 2012 (143) and 2013 (156) in comparison with five years earlier, 2007 (65) and 2008 (66), respectively (see Figure 1). Many of the professionals made redundant by traditional media companies undertook new digital-only projects as a way to face the crisis. 2018 and 2019 data is provisional due to the ongoing nature of the database, which was last updated in November 2019.

Meanwhile, the growth of internet access in Spain expanded the potential audience for digital news media. The share of households with internet access in Spain soared from 36% in 2007 to 61% in 2013, and 83% in 2018 (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, 2019, p. 65). This growth arguably favored digital natives more than traditional media, whose core revenues did not come from their digital audience.

The years of the Great Recession were an accelerator for the development of digital-native media in Spain. Figure 2 shows how the overall number of active digital-native media evolved over time, only considering outlets for which a launch date could be determined.

4.2. Audiences for Digital-Native Brands among the Top Legacy Competitors

Digital-native news organizations have managed to occupy an important share of the digital media map, and some of these operations have also earned the readership of large audiences (see Table 3). According to survey data, legacy brands are still a majority in the rankings of the most popular online news sites in Spain. There are five newspaper websites and two private television websites in the first ten places, but notably there are also three journalist-led, digital-native news sites in these top positions.

In the broader ranking of the top 25 news websites, we found long-running, turn-of-the-century digital-native sites, such as *El Confidencial* (6th) and *Libertad Digital* (19th), and most importantly for our research interests, there emerged a handful of operations that were a direct result of the economic and political changes affecting the media industry in Spain in the decade of the 2010s: *Eldiario.es* (4th), *Okdiario* (10th) and *El Español* (25th), all founded by former senior editors of print daily newspapers. They are just three successful cases in a broader trend including sites such as *VozPópuli*, *InfoLibre* and *El Independiente*, to name a few in Madrid. Another re-

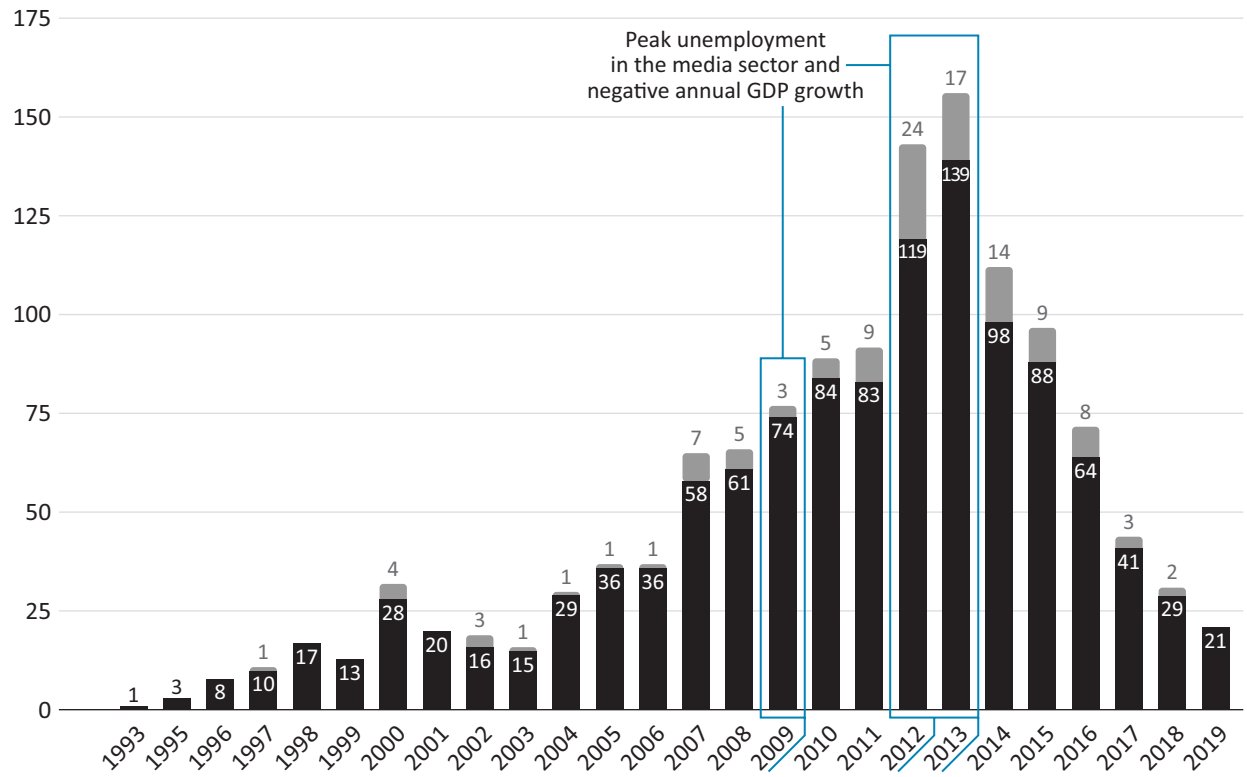

Figure 1. Number of currently active (black) and inactive (gray) digital-native sites in Spain by launch year (N = 1,750, November 2019). Note: Year not determined for 164 active and 249 inactive sites. Source: Authors' own database.

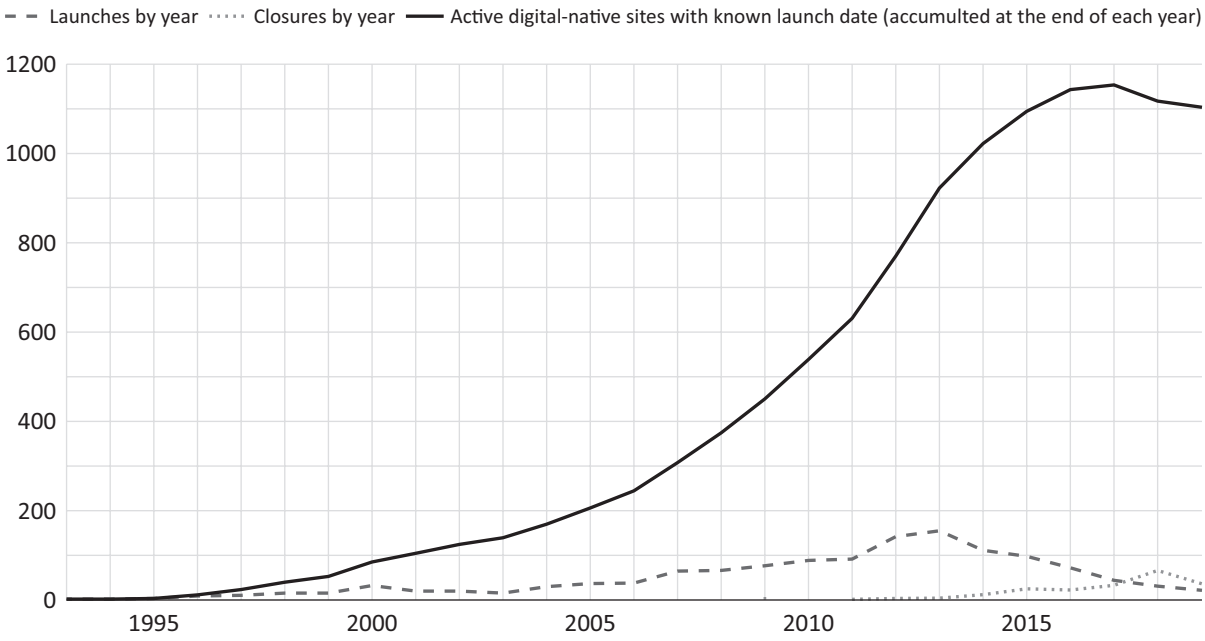

Figure 2. Number of active digital-native sites in Spain with known launch year, by year (N = 1,750, November 2019). Notes: Launch year not determined for 164 active and 249 inactive sites. Closure year not determined for 171 inactive sites. Source: Authors' own database.

Table 3. Weekly online reach for news (%) among adult digital news users in Spain (N ≈ 2000, January–February of each year).

Rank	Online brand	Origin	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
1	*El País*	Newspaper	24	27	29	34	23	31
2	*El Mundo*	Newspaper	18	22	22	28	18	27
3	*Antena 3*	Television	18	15	19	23	14	19
4	*Eldiario.es*	Digital-native	18	18	16	17	8	8
5	*20 Minutos*	Newspaper	15	17	17	21	16	18
6	*El Confidencial*	Digital-native	14	19	16	20	10	9
7	*Marca*	Newspaper (sports)	13	15	16	19	14	22
8	*La Vanguardia*	Newspaper	13	12	11	11	7	5
9	*Telecinco*	Television	13	9	11	13	9	8
10	*OKdiario*	Digital-native	12	12	8	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	*LaSexta*	Television	12	13	13	16	11	14
12	*ABC*	Newspaper	10	12	11	15	9	N/A
13	*El Periódico*	Newspaper	10	10	11	13	5	9
14	*RTVE*	Television and radio	10	13	12	16	11	13
15	*Yahoo! News*	Digital-native (news aggregator)	10	13	14	17	8	N/A
16	*Público*	Newspaper (now digital-only)	9	12	12	13	10	N/A
17	*MSN News*	Digital-native (news aggregator)	8	13	10	16	9	N/A
18	*La Razón*	Newspaper	8	8	9	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	*Libertad Digital*	Digital-native	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	*Cuatro*	Television	8	7	7	11	6	9
21	*Cadena SER*	Radio	7	8	8	13	8	10
22	*El Huffington Post*	Digital-native	7	11	12	14	8	4
23	*As*	Newspaper (sports)	7	7	7	8	6	N/A
24	*COPE*	Radio	7	7	6	8	4	5
25	*El Español*	Digital-native	6	9	7	7	N/A	N/A

Note: Question: "Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply." Source: Authors' own based on the Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey, conducted by YouGov (Vara-Miguel et al., 2019).

markable case is that of *Público* (16th), the largest brand which, just like other regional and local titles, turned online only as it ceased its daily print operations and it laid off most of its staff. Also among the top sites are the Spanish editions of global news aggregators, namely *Yahoo! News* (15th) and *MSN News* (17th), which only offer stories provided by other outlets. Yet one more notable contender is the Spanish edition of *HuffPost* (22nd), owned and operated by the publishers of *El País*.

4.3. Synergies of Digital-Native Media with Traditional Platforms

Only 15.7% of active digital-native media had a multiplatform presence that was secondary to the main digital operation—otherwise they would have been coded as non-native—with 13% of these media being present in two platforms, 2.4% in three platforms and 0.4% in four platforms.

Among the 1,382 currently-active sites, 86 (6.2%) were found to have a mobile application available, either for Android or iOS or for both platforms; 75 (5.4%) had a print component, such as a free or paid-for magazine or non-daily newspaper that had been launched along with, or later than, the main online operation, either as an offline advertising platform or as an added-value feature for subscribers. On the broadcast side, 50 (3.6%) had a radio presence, and just as many were present on television; these figures include new, specialized verticals belonging to broadcast media groups, and long-running independent outlets that had become established as important regional online players and have forayed into broadcasting based on synergies and the decreasing costs of digital production and distribution.

4.4. General-Interest or Specialized: Topic Scope of Active and Inactive Digital Media

General-interest contents were present in 806 (58.3%) of active digital-native media, whereas 576 (41.7%) focused on specialized topics. The web initially favored targeting niche audiences through specialized content, and then there was an increase in media that chose to supply a menu of general news, with differences in their editorial focus and in how stories were covered and presented in the digital environment (see Table 4).

Active digital-native media covered a wide range of specialized topics. Four in ten of these sites belonged to either of the two leading categories—sports and culture—with more than a hundred brands classified in each of these areas: 116 sites (20.1% of all active specialized digital-native outlets) were found to focus on sporting news and results, and 104 covered any or all of the disciplines of culture and the arts (18.8% of active specialized digital-native sites). Almost one in ten specialized digital-native sites was devoted to leisure and entertainment, with news about showbiz, television, travel, and other pastimes; this category added up to 54, representing 9.4% of specialized sites. A very similar proportion was assigned to technical and professional publications (53 and 9.2%). These were followed by other categories for which there is also an extensive supply of legacy brands. The topic spectrum also reveals that the tastes and preferences of publics change over time and that the media must adapt to the increasingly combined and diversified consumption driven by audiences' habits and choices (see Table 5).

4.5. Geographical Location in Spain: Metropolitan Madrid and beyond

The territorial distribution of digital-native news media is not strictly proportional to the population. Most of the digital-native media are concentrated in the most important cities and the regions with higher economic development. There is a metropolitan effect within the country, as the Community of Madrid is home to almost one in three digital-native sites (383, 28.9%), twice its share of the Spanish population. This is further driven by the fact that the biggest media groups, almost all of them based in the Spanish capital and its surroundings, have a wide portfolio of digital properties.

In most regions, the slight disproportion between the number of digital-native media and the population may result from the limitations of the sources of our census-like database. Outside Madrid, the larger regions with a high proportion of digital-native media per 100,000 people are sparsely populated areas, such as the Chartered Community of Navarre, with notable capitals and hundreds of small municipalities. On the other hand, regions with higher overall population and population density, such as Catalonia, the Valencian Community, and the Basque Country, show a lower proportion of digital natives. The lowest proportion occurs in Andalusia, ranking third by number of digital-native sites but first by population (see Table 6), which may be linked with lower news readership.

4.6. Private (and Minimally Public) Ownership

There were around 1,341 privately owned, digital-native news websites in Spain in business in November 2019;

Table 4. General-interest and specialized digital-native news media (N = 1,382, November 2019).

Status	General-interest	% by status	Specialized	% by status
Active	806	58.3	576	41.7
Inactive	201	50.1	164	40.9

Note: Topic scope could not be determined for 36 (8.9%) of the 401 inactive digital-native sites. Source: Authors' own database.

Table 5. Main topic focus of active specialized digital-native news media (N = 576, November 2019).

Topic	Quantity	% of specialist digital-native sites
Sport	116	20.1
Culture (literature, cinema, music, art)	108	18.8
Leisure and entertainment	54	9.4
Technical and professional	53	9.2
Science and technology	43	7.5
Business and finance	40	6.9
Politics	28	4.9
Motor	23	4
Fashion and trends	21	3.7
Health	17	3
Food	13	2.3
Environment	12	2.1
Home and family	12	2.1
Other	10	1.7
Bullfighting	9	1.6
Religion and spirituality	8	1.4
Sexuality	4	0.7
Education	4	0.7
Humor	1	0.2

Source: Authors' own database.

Table 6. Geographical location of active digital-native media (N = 1,382, November 2019).

Autonomous Community (Spanish region)	Active digital-native media	% of active digital-native media	% of Spanish population	Difference in % points between % of active digital-native media and % of population	Digital-native media per 100,000 people
Community of Madrid	383	28.9	14.1	14.8	5.8
Catalonia	199	15	16.3	−1.3	2.6
Andalusia	130	9.8	18	−8.2	1.6
Valencian Community	106	8	10.6	−2.6	2.1
Castile and Leon	69	5.2	4.6	0.6	2.9
Castilla-La Mancha	68	5.1	4.3	0.8	3.4
Galicia	61	4.6	5.8	−1.2	2.3
Basque Country	45	3.4	5.2	−1.8	2.0
Canary Islands	45	3.4	4.6	−1.2	2.1
Aragon	41	3.1	2.8	0.3	3.1
Extremadura	34	2.6	2.3	0.3	3.2
Region of Murcia	32	2.4	3.2	−0.8	2.2
Balearic Islands	26	2	2.4	−0.4	2.3
Chartered Community of Navarre	25	1.9	1.4	0.5	3.9
Principality of Asturias	25	1.9	2.2	−0.3	2.4
Cantabria	21	1.6	1.2	0.4	3.6
La Rioja	10	0.8	0.7	0.1	3.2
Ceuta	4	0.3	0.2	0.1	4.7

Notes: No active digital-native news media were found in the Autonomous City of Melilla (population: 86,384). It was not possible to identify the location of 58 digital-native media for this census. Source for website data: Authors' own database. Source for population data: INE (2016).

these represented 97% of all active digital-native news media, whereas just around 1.5% of them (21) were owned by public institutions directly, and ownership could not be determined for another 1.5% (20). The weighting was similar among inactive digital-native news media, with 229 private sites and 7 public ones, but ownership could not be determined for more than one in three of these sites which were no longer in operation.

4.7. Advertisements Dominate Revenue Sources

Among all the ways to fund online news operations, 89.2% (1,233) of all active digital-native sites carried advertising; 14.8% (204) received funding in the form of sponsorship from public institutions, a category comprising governmental programs that support media in minority languages, or cultural or regional development; 6.4% (89) included branded or sponsored content; 5.2% (72) had some kind of private sponsorship; 4.9% (68) accepted donations, and 4% (55) sold subscriptions. Other sources of revenue included online shops, selling either editorial products or any other kinds of merchandise (in more than 20 instances); digital communications services; and management or consultancy offered by the publishing company to other businesses and organizations. In addition, there were a few voluntary membership schemes designed for committed users to support the news outlet, which cannot be considered as standard subscriptions.

5. Conclusion

The present quantitative study of digital-native news media has enabled us to present an updated and representative profile of such media in the context of online news media in Spain. The paradox of the surge in digital-native media we describe is that it occurred during a series of economic, political, and media industry crises of historic proportions. Not only was the media industry in crisis during the past decade, drained of advertising revenue by search and social platforms, but the economy of Spain and Western Europe was suffering from a Great Recession. One would expect that people would be less likely to support media with their own financial resources.

However, the surge in new media follows the pattern of creative destruction described by economic theorists from Marx to Schumpeter (Elliott, 1980): The failure of old methods and models stimulates innovation and opens the way for entrepreneurs willing to experiment with developing new revenue sources, narrative formats, distribution channels, production methods, and differentiated content.

Responding to RQ1, in 2019, there were 1,382 active digital-native media in Spain and they represented 46.4% of all active digital publications in the country. In addition to that, 8 of the 25 most-read online media brands were digital-native, with three of them in the top 10 (see Table 3). These sites have been growing and invigorating the media industry with their innovations. For this reason, journalism across the industry has become much more entrepreneurial, and we can affirm with Bradshaw (2018, p. 1): "This is a period of enormous creativity and change, a time when young journalists (and many older ones) have a unique opportunity to try new things, learn and grow quickly and innovate in a completely new form of storytelling."

As mentioned earlier, it seems paradoxical that the creation of digital-native media in Spain would peak at the height of the media crisis, which saw the closing of hundreds of media outlets and the layoff of at least 12,000 journalists. However, many of these displaced journalists tried to fill some of the gaps left by failed media and they kept working as journalists. They took advantage of their severance pay, which is relatively generous for long-term, well-paid employees under Spanish law, to support themselves while launching digital publications. They built their websites using free or low-cost publishing technology tools that were becoming available. But while the founders of these startups may have understood journalism, many didn't know much about business: one-fifth of new media founded by journalists in this context (121) had closed or were inactive by 2015 (APM, 2015, p. 82).

The biggest problem for these media was that their founders did not have a business plan or commercial focus, the APM (2015, p. 87) report concluded. A third of their publications had revenues of less than 25,000 euros a year; almost 60% were generating 25,000–50,000 euros, scarcely enough to keep one or two people gainfully employed. Almost two-thirds of them were counting on advertising or sponsorship to generate revenue at a time when advertisers were fleeing to the more targeted, more efficient search and social platforms.

In relation to RQ2, along with the very widespread reliance on advertising as the default source of revenue, we can describe a landscape of almost exclusively privately-owned digital-native sites, located disproportionately more in the Madrid metropolitan region, and with more of the general-interest than of the specialist kind. Among the latter, the dominant topics fit into the broad categories of Sport and Culture, as each of them makes around 20% of specialist sites, whereas hard news themes such as Business and Finance, and Politics, just fall short of 7% and 5% respectively.

At the end of the 2010s, the decade that was stirred by the Great Recession, reader-funded digital-native initiatives are a small minority, not reaching one in ten cases in total, either by compulsory subscription or with voluntary donations or a membership program. Even when they exist, they usually come in combination with the support of advertisers or institutions. Only a few digital natives attempted to add value to their editorial and commercial proposition through expansion into a multiplatform media presence in the form of mobile applications, or with weekly, monthly, or fortnightly print products, or digital radio or television spin-offs.

The potential sustainability of these digital natives can be seen more clearly through the lens of Picard (2010). He viewed the heavy dependence of news organizations on advertising as a formula for long-term loss of readers, revenue, and influence. He argued that publishers' relentless quest for bigger audiences to satisfy advertisers creates little value for users. If all media are covering the same breaking news events, natural disas-

ters, and celebrity scandals, the result is "excessive sameness," he said, in reference to Hotelling's law for market economics (Picard, 2010, p. 18). Picard (2010) went on to explain that readers do not value this information enough to pay for it, especially when many outlets offer such content free on their websites to attract clicks. The organizations that survive will have to be differentiated and innovative.

A problem with Spain's digital-native news organizations is that they have been slow to develop new business models. Newman (2019) surveyed 200 digital news leaders at major publications from 29 countries—including 40 editors-in-chief, 30 CEOs or managing directors, and 30 heads of digital—on their plans and projections for the future of their organizations. Among the trends they emphasized were the importance of "labelling and prioritising" trusted content to build credibility with the public. Related to that was "a shift toward user payment as a core business model" (Newman, 2019, p. 44). Even publishers that rely on advertising "are refocusing on loyalty and building relationships over time" (Newman, 2019, p. 44). The emphasis is on news as a public service. The data in our research suggests that Spain's media have not yet pivoted sufficiently in that direction.

Picard (2010) contended that the future of news organizations as sustainable enterprises requires focusing more on users than on advertisers. It lies in creating specialized content sufficiently differentiated that people perceive value in it for themselves, enough that they will pay for it: "Only by being distinct can one achieve higher value and profit" (Picard, 2010, p. 111). A news publisher's survival, as he saw it, depends on creating a greater quantity of original content that is relevant to users: "How well products and services solve consumers' problems, ease the tasks and challenges of life, and satisfy other needs are an important part in the perception of their value" (Picard, 2010, p. 51).

In that context, two of the most successful digital natives in Spain bolster his arguments: *El Confidencial* and *Eldiario.es*. In describing themselves and their value propositions, both accentuate that they serve the interests of the public first and that they are independent of commercial and political interests that could influence their coverage. They emphasize the importance of financial independence in maintaining editorial independence.

El Confidencial was founded before the crisis, in 2002, and it focuses on business, the economy, and politics. It has a stated mission of "contributing to a freer and better-informed society" (*El Confidencial*, 2019). It has a business model based on advertising, but a significant percentage of that is native advertising, also called sponsored content, which aims to align itself with the values and the mission of the publication. It reported 2018 revenues of a record 18.2 million euros, up 17% from the previous year, and after-tax earnings of 3.3 million. Its newsroom has grown to 95 journalists, with 155 employees overall. Its events business grew 30% over the previous year (*El Confidencial*, 2019). In September 2019, it began offering a premium subscription product aimed at business users.

Eldiario.es, founded well into the crisis, in 2012, has attracted attention with a revenue model supported by 35,000 members, who pay a minimum of 60 euros a year, not for access to content but to support independent investigative journalism for all. The site generated an estimated 5.7 million euros in annual revenues in 2018, up 19%, with close to 2 million euros coming from the members (Escolar, 2018). The company has grown its profit every year and it has reinvested it in the product: It grew its staff from 72 to 83 in 2018. The site has free access, but the members receive some extra benefits: They can hide the advertisements, they can access some content a few hours ahead of the non-paying users, they get a quarterly print publication, and they receive some discounts and passes to events. Its mission is "to hold the powerful accountable, to protect freedom, and promote a sustainable society. We defend human rights, equality, and a better democracy" (eldiario.es, n.d.).

These two examples are among the few that are thriving while producing news in the public interest, with a reputation for editorial independence and fair working and pay conditions. However, the latest annual APM report to date described the work environment for journalists in Spain as "hostile" (APM, 2019, p. 6). According to the professional survey in this report, 44% of freelance journalists worked for a digital daily outlet, as opposed to 26% of staff journalists, and 30% of freelancers worked for digital magazines, which only employed 5% of all news media staffers (APM, 2019, p. 9).

At the same time, the overall failure rate of digital natives should not be a cause for pessimism or alarm. The vast majority of startups in all industries fail within a few years. The good news is that so many have survived and that some have actually prospered. As successful digital launches become established incumbents that make up a considerable share of the market, according to Schumpeter's (1942) theory they need not only to adapt to changes but also to continue to disrupt what making news media means in the online world, as new products and services compete for users' time and money. The context can be uncertain—not only for legacy media but also for digital-native ones—but "survival is a precondition for success" (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012, p. 100). As part of the process of creative destruction, failed media enterprises become learning experiences for some who will try again.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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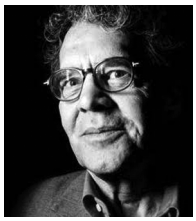

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Article

Behind the Comments Section: The Ethics of Digital Native News Discussions

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Abstract
Initially offered as a digital public sphere forum, comments sections became the preferred democratic arena for gatekeepers to encourage their readers to engage in constructive dialogue about relevant issues. However, news sites require commenters to remain civil in their interactions, which led users to seek alternative ways of commenting on the news. This article explores in-depth the contents of a sample of 98,426 user-comments collected between February–March 2019 from three major Spanish digital native newspapers: *ElDiario.es*, *ElEspañol.com*, and *ElConfidencial.com*. The main goals were to analyze whether comments in news outlets are deliberative, to assess the quality of the debate that takes place in them, and to describe their specific features. Discourse ethics were explored to determine the discussions' impact, the language used, the acceptance of arguments, and the recognition and civility of participants. Findings reveal that comments sections in news outlets do not have a dialogic nature and that the debates have a low-quality profile. Nonetheless, the degree of mutual respect in interaction is acceptable, with slightly observed levels of incivility. Finally, the data suggest that the focused comments are higher on social media and that memes and emojis represent a new form of digital discourse.

Keywords
discourse ethics; native digital media; new media; newspapers; social media; user-generated content

Issue
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1. Introduction

On a global scale, unimaginable before, places, communities, and networks have emerged online (Bowen, 1996; Goode, 2009), allowing their members to discuss topics that matter and to share openly and freely specific common interests and ideas inside flourishing digital ecosystems (Papacharissi, 2004). Online discourse has increased political participation strengthening citizen rights (Cammaerts & Audenhove, 2005) while at the same time, new information and communications technology innovations, like the popularisation of the smartphone, have helped revive the public sphere (Ruiz et al., 2011). Despite the benefits of this digital transformation, engagement has also brought up negative nuances as well. As the amount of information available online increases, and as more people started to take part in the online public sphere and on social platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Kies, 2010), the number of discourse problems has skyrocketed (Aurigi, 2016). Hate speech (Waldron, 2012); fake news (Mcnair, 2018); misinformation (Vergeer, 2018) and incivility (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014) are just some of the today's most common issues facing online discourse. These difficult times make us question if we are witnessing the reinvention of digital journalism (Salaverría, 2019) and a new intricate discourse reality within online public spheres such as news outlet comments sections. In light of the preced-

ing, the importance of analyzing discursive ethics from the readers' comments in native digital media is crucial, since there is currently a research gap in this area. The current study examines explicitly online newspapers, a digital medium that has not yet been addressed in existing studies on participation and online discourse ethics. Three native digital news publications of reference in Spain are analyzed, including their comments sections and their official pages on Twitter and Facebook.

2. Literature Review

User-generated content in the form of comments constitutes a way of capturing the degree of the users' commitment with the news, since, when choosing to leave a contribution below a story, the user is showing an interest in its content, the newspaper's brand and the deliberative component of such interaction (Hermida, 2011; Ksiazek, Peer, & Lessard, 2016; Meltzer, 2015; Ruiz et al., 2011; Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015; Weber, 2014; Ziegele, 2016). Experts in the field have highlighted the opportunities and challenges for journalists presented by the comments and the intricate dynamic between the media and users (Paskin, 2010; Rowe, 2014; Ruiz et al., 2011; Springer et al., 2015). Others have pointed out the democratic and plural aspect of the comments and their potential to shape public opinion (Dahlberg, 2011; Goode, 2009; Papacharissi, 2004; Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011; Weber, 2014).

Comments published in the media have not always lived up to the expectations of the theorists who defend the deliberative character of public opinion construction (Stroud, Jomini, Scacco, & Curry, 2015). Providing the opportunity to comment on the news has been one of the most consistent and widely implemented strategies of the mainstream media (Graham & Wright, 2015; Stroud, Scacco, & Curry, 2014; Ziegele, 2016) mainly because comments contribute to attracting users, promoting brand loyalty and encouraging engagement (Goodman & Cherubini, 2013). Comments allow users to participate in a discussion on the topics covered in the news stories, in addition to voicing their opinions and sharing ideas (Ruiz et al., 2011). From a liberal perspective, the comments are a sign of the political times and the deep globalization of sources of information. They belong to a new period of deliberative digital democracy (Dahlberg, 2011). In this regard, comments sections provide a democratic space for users outside traditional channels. Comments sections are being used to dispute news stories, to argue, to communicate with other readers, and to learn. (Robinson, 2010, p. 137). Tenenboim and Cohen (2015) imply that user comments have a role to play in building social and community identity, such as political issues and controversies do on news articles. According to Robinson (2010, p. 137), people posting comments value the ability to exercise freedom of speech. They expect openness, mutual respect, and a self-moderated framework that assesses the comments within the community.

Comments are an asset in any story because they enable public discussion of issues and thereby serve as a tool for deliberation (Springer et al., 2015). However, while both journalists and audiences (Barnes, 2015; Meltzer, 2015) find the presence of comments in the media enriching, both groups express concern about the quality of the discussions taking place (Anderson, 2011; Springer et al., 2015). Clearly, without human interaction, there will not be comments; social media could not have a place online (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). Nevertheless, this same humanity is what makes the Internet a problematic, complicated place. In this milieu, several authors have provided operational definitions of what incivility looks like. These definitions include vulgarity, stereotypes, and insults (Chen, 2017; Gervais, 2015). Other definitions include the use of irony to mock people or situations, name-calling, hyperbole, or rudeness (Gervais, 2013). As Chen (2017, p. 5) states, "Incivility can be a slippery notion. What constitutes incivility varies from person to person, so it is difficult to come up with a rule of what incivility means or even describe discourse that is consistently viewed as uncivil."

In many cases, user-comments do not meet the basic standards of mutual respect, as they are often uncivil and irrational (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Rowe, 2015). Though only a handful of contributions enrich and encourage a lively debate (Masip, 2011), more and more frequently, these comments are mixed with insults, derogatory remarks, or racist and xenophobic slurs. As Larsson (2018, p. 618) points out, "Internet is perceived-from a free-for-all utopia of public discussion, to more problem-laden rhetoric surrounding the hate speech and bitter rhetoric that one is likely to happen upon in forums such as newspaper comment fields." Nonetheless, the presence of a higher degree of controversy and uncivil behavior among readers cannot be considered generalized in the comment sections, since the moderation and user registration policies developed by the media contribute to ensuring that the general tone of the debates does not exceed the discourse limits (Domingo, 2015; Ksiazek, Peer, & Zivic, 2015). When it does, it is usually focused on quite specific themes and targets (Coe et al., 2014), such as immigration, women, and minorities (Chen et al., 2018; Gardiner et al., 2016). For Hwang, Kim, and Kim (2018), incivility is operationalized as simple "disrespectful statements or attacks" toward someone else. Hence, an uncivil discourse has also been defined as that in which "communication violates the norms of courtesy of a given culture" (Mutz, 2015).

Conversely, as Wessler (2008) states, for it to be indeed a space that feeds deliberation, user discourse has to be reasoned, that is, the participants must provide evidence and reasons for the statements. The discourse must also be civil; that is, the comments must be transmitted politely and respectfully. Civility and reasoning are two critical features of deliberative discourse (Freelon, 2015). Civility is a crucial concept in political deliberation (Gastil, Deess, & Weiser, 2002; Min, 2007). It

refers to the attitude shown by people who view each other with mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Brooks & Geer, 2007) and who conform to basic rules of courtesy. Jamieson, Volinsky, Weitz, and Kenski (2017) point out that civility underlies all discourse that does not silence or eliminate different points of view, but instead manifests respect. Thus, civility is a central component of the debate that requires respect and enables the presence of different points of view (Stryker, Conway, & Danielson, 2016). However, while civility is more focused on norms that promote the collective good, politeness, or cordiality, incivility conveys messages that use an unnecessarily disrespectful tone (Coe et al., 2014). For example, *ad hominem* fallacies fall into this definition. *Ad hominem* fallacies are when a user refers negatively toward the social construct of another (Gervais, 2015). Incivility has also been examined within story categories. Politics (national affairs), economy, and sports often generate high levels of incivility (Coe et al., 2014; Muddiman & Stroud, 2017). The incivility present in politics and public affairs is particularly relevant in that it causes cracks in spaces of deliberation and citizen participation that are at the heart of digital democracy (Herbst, 2010; Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011). Recently, Weber et al. (2020) found that reading uncivil and hateful user comments against refugees negatively impacted participants' attitudes towards them, even exerting indirect effects on prosocial behavior.

Moreover, new research has shown that between 22% and 33% of the comments posted on the sites and Facebook pages of multiple regional and national media include derogatory words, profanity, or unfounded accusations of misinformation (Coe et al., 2014; Su et al., 2018). Nevertheless, for the scholar Papacharissi (2004), incivility has a purpose, and that is to disrupt the collective roots of democracy. According to her study, the messages that should concern us the most are those that, while being courteous, threaten democratic traits or use antagonistic stereotypes. Another core component of incivility is the anonymity that is permitted in online spaces and how it affects the level of discussion, allowing for higher levels of incivility (Graf, Erba, & Harn, 2017; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). Alternatively, while anonymity has permitted an increase in flaming and incivility, it also has the advantage of reflecting more honest, emotional opinions, which may, therefore, be further representative of the users' discourse (Papacharissi, 2004). Anonymity is, consequently, one of the central concerns in the nature of online discussions as it can be considered both beneficial and harmful (Witchge, 2014). When eliminated, the level of civility in the comments within the newsmedia sites increases significantly, notwithstanding their suppression reduces the number and variety of opinions (Santana, 2014).

In the media, very often quantity takes precedence over the quality of comments (Masip, 2011). A quality that, following Habermas (1984, 1992), should be measured by the presence of argumentation, logic, and coherence of arguments, the search for collective truth, the recognition of the counterpart and respect in dialogue. Similarly, the media have acknowledged their responsibility in fostering high-quality user debates on their digital platforms (Ksiazek, 2018). Most importantly, there is a notable difference between cross-platform user-generated content. Rowe (2015) found that discourse quality varied, adding "website commenters are more likely to engage in higher-quality discussion than Facebook commenters" (Rowe, 2015, p. 552). This characteristic may be influenced—not only by the fact that the media moderate user-generated content—but also by the fact that user engagement with news articles on social media is characterized by short, emotional, and consensual comments (Ben-David & Soffer, 2019). Indeed, the media tend to divert the participation of their readers towards social networks (Larsson, 2018), which reduces the presence of anonymous comments and improves their quality (Hille & Bakker, 2014). An increasing number of media outlets are removing comment sections from their websites and instead focusing their efforts on building online communities on their Facebook pages (Ellis, 2015). It is important to note that Facebook adheres to a real name policy, which implies, among other things, that users act in a more honest, civic manner (Su et al., 2018; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). However, some highlight Twitter as a suitable medium for fostering social dialogue (Williams, Russell-Mayhew, Nutter, Arthur, & Kassan, 2018). Twitter is a rich source of data containing diverse views and perspectives from a wide range of individuals (Apoorva, Vaishnav, Chowdary, & Uddagiri, 2016). The simple presence of an open comment section on online media pages negatively influences the perception of the media's credibility (Conlin & Roberts, 2016; Prochazka, Weber, & Schweiger, 2018). However, even though both Facebook and Twitter are the two most popular platforms for public debates, users mostly prefer to make comments on the pages of the media themselves, as they can probably express themselves more frankly than in the case of a social network, in which, moreover, comments are automatically shared with friends, family, and acquaintances (Hille & Bakker, 2014). As a result, in the case of the media, the activity and debate of users are perhaps more extensive and of higher quality in the comments section of the media itself than on its Facebook page (Rowe, 2015). As Ben-David and Soffer (2019) point out, readers' comments on the same news on different platforms can vary significantly based on each platform's cultural practices and technological affordances, which, in turn, shape the public discussion of news. Although social networks can offer newspapers an important source of interaction, interactivity reduces over reactivity, i.e., the private response from one user to another without a dialogical character (Carey, 2014). Interestingly, it is this reactivity that seems to favor a lack of courtesy in the comments, which is more moderate in cases where there is debate among readers through the comments (Coe et al.,

2014). Alternatively, and as summarized by Strandberg and Berg (2013), "Online reader comments function as a mix of both platforms for democratic conversations and virtual soapboxes.''

3. Methods

3.1. Research Corpus

For the development of this study, we have chosen multiple methodological frameworks composed of several techniques. Qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other. By examining the research question from two different perspectives, one can get a better perspective on the social phenomenon under study, namely the deliberative dynamics of user-comments within digital newspapers. A qualitative textual analysis—using the normative approach of Habermas' (1984) discourse ethics—was applied in the sample of comments collected. According to Habermas' theory, for the discourse to be valid, truth, clarity, sincerity, and legitimacy have to take place inside the conversation so that any of the conversation's participants can call them into question. His theory also aims to outline the conditions for rational argumentation based on the moral behavior of the members in the discussion (Habermas, 1992). For our study, Habermas' approach is appropriate because it allowed us to fully examine and interpret the body of user-generated content within the comments section located below each news article, as well as outside the comments sections in official accounts on Facebook and Twitter. The selected corpus was composed of three general-interest native digital newspapers available nationwide: *ElDiario.es*, *ElEspañol.com*, and *ElConfidencial.com*. The digital nature of these newspapers played an important role in their selection. The news outlets studied are among the most visited in Spain (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). Their informative dissemination has considerable relevance in Spain and possesses a substantial presence in social networks. In our sample, we examined, by hand, the discursive ethics of a one-month cluster sample of comments. Comments were collected from stories belonging to the "most read" section of the day. These news items were taken from the landing page of each one of the news outlets chosen for analysis. News items were gathered in two-time sessions, in the morning at 10:00 and the evening at 22:00. For each domain, we aimed to gather a somewhat equal number of news pieces. On average, this resulted in six stories per session. At the evening session, news stories that remained high in the ranking were updated for new recordings. This method allowed us to work with a consistent and more balanced dataset. Accordingly, in quantitative terms, we initially set up an average number of comments generated during the sampling period. We collected data on the most commented news sections and frequency of users per news outlet, the number of users by username type, and impacts—shares, likes, retweets—on social media, and the amount of user-generated content such as emojis and memes. Data were controlled and measured by combining cross-sectional analysis with content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018), which provided us with a deeper understanding of the data collected at the same point in time in a representative subset. We have defined the following research questions:

RQ1: Do the news outlets comment sections have a deliberative nature?

RQ2: What is the quality of the debate that users make in the comments section? Does incivility influence the dynamics of the discursive ethics of user comments?

RQ3: What kind of specific features do the comments have based on their distribution platform?

3.2. Case Study

We have chosen a case study approach because we consider it appropriate when researching contemporary phenomena in a real context. In our case, the study of the discourse ethics within user-comments from digital-only newspapers in Spain and social networks. We performed qualitative textual analysis performed in a fully manually fashion—using the normative approach of Habermas' discourse ethics (Habermas, 1984)—of the conversations generated by users. This analysis was completed using a codebook (Habermas, 1984, 1992; Masip, Noci, Domingo, Micó, & Ruiz, 2012; Ruiz, Massip, Micó-Sanz, Díaz-Noci, & Domingo, 2010) that collected and classified the contributions generated by the users at the bottom of the news pieces, with a specific focus on the comments. Following these criteria, we used content analysis, which allowed, in addition to obtaining a qualitative view of the comments, to acquire nuances of a quantitative nature as well (Kothari, 2004). Accordingly, in quantitative terms, we initially established an average number of comments generated during the sampling period, the frequency of comments and most commented news sections by news outlet, and the number of users based on their preferred username. Data was measured using the quantitative computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo 12. The use of different methodological techniques allowed us to complete a cross-sectional analysis, which gave us a deeper understanding of data collected at the same point in time in a sample population and a representative subset.

4. Sample and Data Analysis

The sample covered a compound month, that is, taking the first day of the week, in this case, the first Monday of the first month of the sample, and from there, alternating one day on, one day off until we obtained 30 days of

date from a total of eight weeks. We started on February 1st, 2019, and completed data collection on March 27th, 2019. The reason for this sampling method was to ensure that the same stories did not repeat in the next sampling session. For the selection of the sample, a cluster sampling method was chosen. In the first phase, we captured the comments below each article belonging to the "most-viewed" section from the day of the sample. Data was gathered from the landing page of each of the digital news outlets studied. For social networks, due to the vast amount of data captured, only the story with the most comments on a particular day was chosen for final coding. It is worth noting that due to the restrictions of the Facebook comment ranking algorithm, only those comments available in each post could be used for analysis. Since July 2019, comments available on public pages

Table 1. User-comments discourse ethics codebook.

I. Identification Record					
No. datasheet:	Outlet:	Publishing date:	Sample date:	Total comments:	News Section:

II. Information Concerning the Conversation			
No. of users: With nicknames/with proper name	No. of mentions among users	No. of replies:	Average user-information
Presence of links	Presence of ads or self-promotion	Contrast with other media	Contrast with other sites

III. Social Networks					
Facebook			**Twitter**		
No. of comments	No. of shares	No. of likes	No. of comments	No. of retweets	No. of likes
No. of memes	No. of GIFs	No. of emojis	No. of memes	No. of GIFs	No. of emojis

IV. Discourse comment ethics	
Logic and coherence	
Coding Segment	**Discourse rules**
a. Do users focus on the topic of the news story? b. Do users try to argue the point?	1.1. No speaker may contradict themselves 1.2. Every speaker who applies predicate F to object A must be prepared to apply F to all other objects resembling A in all relevant respects 1.3. Different speakers may not use the same expression with different meanings
Collective search for truth	
a. Do users respect and acknowledge each other as valid members of the conversation? b. Does the comment contain incivility, profanity, or derogatory remarks? c. Do users provide a different point of view than other comments? d. Do users question each other and ask for clarification on expressed views?	2.1. Each speaker may only asset what he/she himself/herself believes 2.2. Messages containing name-calling, aspersion, vulgarity derogatory or/and abusive language, racist remarks, insults will be coded as uncivil
An agreement based on the best argument	
a. Do users endorse an argument of another user? b. Do users mention or refer to other sources? c. Are the sources related to the point of view of most of the users?	3.1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse 3.2. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion, whatever. 3.3. Everyone is permitted to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse

are not shown or ranked as they previously did before, where users saw all comments all the time regarding engagement or post popularity (Shen, 2019). This new rollout affects the reach of comments on public posts from Facebook's 'Pages' and people's 'News Feed' equally. The new feature, called 'comment ranking' patented in the US under the name 'Systems and Methods for Ranking Comments,' ranks comments under a quality signals basis, which means users only see public comments that are timely and relevant to them (Owens, 2017).

For our data collection, we used Ncapture, a plug-in browser of Nvivo. The sample had a pre-established schedule beginning at 10:00 in the morning and ending at 23:59 the same day. We applied a model adapted analysis datasheet, which was based on the theoretical framework of the discursive ethics of the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1992) who believed that dialogue is a set of ethical, rational and moral standards that enable the construction of society and public opinion and therefore has the potential to become the engine for social change. We also applied the methodology of Masip et al. (2012). Each comment was coded into a datasheet, structured upon three discourse segments: 'Logic and Coherence,' 'Collective Search for Truth,' and 'An Agreement Based on the Best Argument.' Each one represents a coding reference followed by a set of questions aimed to answer RQ1 and RQ2 primarily. Therefore, a single comment can be classified into multiple sections depending on the versatility of the comment. Some comments could not be classified and were excluded from the sample (e.g., deleted comments; comments with lack of sufficient argumentation such as spam or advertisements, flagged comments). As aforementioned, every coding category was supported by a series of questions to frame each discursive ethical aspect and perform a qualitative assessment (Table 1). Consequently, each of these questions was preceded by a measurement system, based on one affirmative (yes) and one negative (no) criteria. On social networks, besides from the qualitative assessment carried on comments, a quantitative analysis was applied in order to complement evidence to answer RQ3.

5. Results

During the study period between February 1st, and March 27th, 2019, a dataset of 704 stories, and a total of 98,426 comments for all news outlets was obtained (Table 2). *ElDiario.es* was the news site that produced the most comments, representing 38% of the total sample, followed by *ElEspañol.com* (31.1%) and *ElConfidencial.com* (30.5%). On social networks, 56,611 comments were collected; however, due to data restrictions, both on Facebook and Twitter, only 13,811 comments on Facebook (25% of the total) and 8,880 on Twitter (51% of total) were coded.

From all the comments gathered, 17,466 users, resorted to using a nickname and 9,823 picked their proper name to comment. The registration mechanisms in each news outlet do not prohibit one user from registering multiple nicknames. Therefore it is not possible to ensure that all participants were different individuals. Nicknames on social networks were scarcely recorded; for example, only 423 people commented with a nickname on Facebook. In Spain, most users prefer to identify themselves using their proper names. That said, a minority of users did use their initials or partially combined names.

Most participants commented only once (72.6%; see Table 3). This figure is relatively consistent in *ElDiario.es*

Table 2. Number of comments collected per digital news outlet and social network.

	Comments	Stories	Avg. Comments	Avg. Stories	Facebook	Twitter
ElDiario.es	11,839	294	422	10.5	39,539	4,927
ElConfidencial.com	9,632	205	344	7.3	8,714	699
ElEspanol.com	9,464	205	338	7.3	10,358	3,254
Total	30,935	704	1104	25	58,611	8,880

Notes: Not all comments shown on Facebook, and as a result collected, were available for coding since the social network applies a comment ranking algorithm based on a quality signals basis (Owens, 2017; Shen, 2019). This means that users only see comments that are timely and relevant to them. Other variables included the ranking are posting time, content's overall quality, popularity, and users' previous reactions.

Table 3. Frequency of comments per users (%).

Nº of Comments	*ElDiario.es*	*ElConfidencial.com*	*ElEspañol.com*
1	67	57	94
2	17	20	5.0
3	7.0	10	1.0
4	2.7	3.9	0.0
5 to 9	4.3	5.9	0.0
10 to 14	1.0	2.0	0.0
15–25	1.0	1.0	0.0
≥25	0	0.7	0.0

and *ElConfidencial.com*. However, it rose drastically to 94% in *ElEspañol.com*. By engaging in only one contribution, users do not invest themselves in the debate. Fourteen percent of users engaged twice. Both *Eldiario.es* and *ElConfidencial.com* have users who post more than half a dozen times. This figure includes a group of between 2% and 3% of community members who appear to engage in almost every news article we reviewed.

The analysis of the discourse language elements on social networks considered the presence of memes, emojis, and animated GIFs in the comments. In the case of memes, we found that the users of *ElEspañol.com* use them the most with 3.4% of comments on Facebook containing memes, whereas *ElDiario.es* comes in first on Twitter (1.8%). The memes tend to have a political and sarcastic tone. In the case of emojis, the majority recorded tend to be unaccompanied by any text. The presence of GIFs to convey an idea or argument is still scarce, yet figures are entirely consistent across sites (Table 4). It can be argued that Facebook's new algorithm for comment ranking has limited the number of low-quality comments on public pages. In our sample, we could verify that comments with a poor grammatical or syntactic structure—containing short phrases, an emoji, a GIF, a link, or an Internet shorthand acronym such as 'LOL' or 'Hahaha'—were ranked lower than comments with a more substantial amount of characters.

5.1. Logic and Coherence

Another element to discern the degree of logic and coherence in a conversation is whether the speakers intend to argue about the topic being discussed. Although some digital news outlets have a high number of comments, the majority of users do not stay on topic in the conversations even after automatic post-moderation and before user flagging. An essential number of comments recorded are not linked to the issue present in the published story. In contrast, lively discussions take place in the comment threads. However, consistently across news outlets, a vast majority of participants end up debating topics or issues that have no direct relationship with the current event. Barely 1/10 of *ElDiario.es*' comments are about the news issue introduced by the editor in the article. This figure roses on *ElConfidencial.com* and is higher on *ElEspañol.com* (Table 5). On social media, the overall amount of focused user-contributions is significantly higher on Facebook (21.3%) than on Twitter (4.8%).

A low number of argumentative comments are written. Most users do not introduce new arguments against points of view expressed by other members of the discussion. Deliberative engagement is barely present; the dialog is intense and tends to be civilized, yet users lack the habit of arguing or accepting, even similar points made by another like-minded participant or adversary. Figures obtained are identical in almost all newspapers, with *ElDiario.es* coming on top with 9.4% of argumentative comments coded (Table 6). The relevance of the current affairs of most conversations meant that users tend to get carried away by them and have virtually almost no intention of continuing arguing their points or those from another user. On social media, argumentative comments arise on Twitter and include 10.2% of comments, whereas, on Facebook, they account for 6.9% of comments.

5.2. Collective Search for Truth

Regarding the degree of mutual respect in the interaction, generally speaking, users respect and acknowledge each other as valid members of the conversation.

Table 4. Presence of digital discourse language elements on social networks (%).

Nº of Comments	**Facebook**			**Twitter**		
	Emoji	GIF	Meme	Emoji	GIF	Meme
ElDiario.es	7.2	0.8	0.4	4.3	1.5	1.8
ElConfidencial.com	6.8	1.2	0.03	1.9	0.6	0.24
ElEspanol.com	9.1	2.2	3.4	4.8	1.4	1.5

Table 5. Do users focus on the topic of the news story?

			Facebook		Twitter	
	Focused Comments	%	Focused comments	%	Focused comments	%
ElDiario.es	1,113 (N = 11,839)	9.4	1,485 (N = 7,317)	20.2	105 (N = 2,165)	4.8
ElConfidencial.com	1,448 (N = 9,464)	15.3	692 (N = 3,239)	21.3	96 (N = 390)	2.9
ElEspanol.com	1,560 (N = 9,632)	16.2	748 (N = 3,325)	22.4	231 (N = 2,052)	6.9

Table 6. Do users try to argue their point?

				Facebook			Twitter		
	Comments coded	Argumentative comments	%	CC	AC	%	CC	AC	%
ElDiario.es	11,839	1,079	9.1	7,317	526	7.1	2,165	296	13.6
ElConfidencial.com	9,464	698	7.3	3,239	237	7.3	390	237	7.2
ElEspanol.com	9,632	646	6.7	3,325	211	6.3	2,052	327	9.8

The presence of incivility, profanity, or derogatory remarks is low (Table 7). When present, these sorts of remarks are mostly used against personalities in the stories (politicians and celebrities) and power structures, and not against other contributing members. In total, 12.7% of all contributions contain incivilities.

It is also shown that there are derogatory remarks, and when present, these tend to be leveraged at specific social groups. This includes citizens belonging to minority groups: women, LGBTQ members, and immigrants (Chen et al., 2018; Ziegele, Breiner, & Quiring, 2014). On Facebook, fewer derogatory comments are perceived, although they are slightly more prominent in the comment sections of the analyzed media and higher on Twitter (Table 7).

The second question to be dealt with in this section is whether users who focus their interventions on the topic under discussion provide numerous or different points of view. We can state that in the analyzed conversations, pluralism is strongly resented. The conversations frequently have a polarized tinge: the majority and minority viewpoints, each of the members belonging to these two groups, are enclosed within their own arguments, which leads to a gradual deterioration of the quality of the comments, discursive clutter and abusive language are observed as well. All these factors are the cause of polarization. Few voices try to add a third approach and introduce other points of view. Substantive dialogue can only become valid; only the intentions of the actors are clear. However, the prerequisite of engagement in substantive debate, is that one's intentions must be fully accessible to the examination and challenge of others. The willingness to verify authenticity is itself a crucial part of the discussion. Without these motives, there cannot be any cooperative search for truth (Habermas, 1992). In the newspapers included in the corpus of the sample, these statements are tangible. In practically no case do the results exceed the 10% threshold, except in *ElEspañol.com*, which obtains 9.4% of different points of view in its debates on its Facebook page (Table 8).

5.3. An Agreement Based on the Best Argument

Users usually do not support other users' argument. The overall percentage on the news outlets was 3.3% and on social networks 2.9%. The sources provided or mentioned by the participants were virtually nonexistent across all media analyzed, with an overall of 6.7%. Sources were barely used and, in cases where they were used, were usually not related to the topic being discussed. Readers do not cite sources that complement, nuance, or broaden their viewpoints or the opinion of other users. The few sources observed generally are not focused on improving the debate but on generating conflict or controversy, and most of them are related to the ideological struggles of the users themselves, moving away from the subject of the discussion.

Table 7. Presence of incivility, profanity and derogatory remarks (%).

	Total	Facebook	Twitter
ElDiario.es	4.9	3.2	8.8
ElConfidencial.com	3.7	4.0	0.9
ElEspanol.com	4.1	2.5	8.5

Table 8. Do participants provide different points of view and question each other and ask for clarifications on expressed views? (%).

			Facebook		Twitter	
	Diverse Points of View	Users Asking for Clarifications	DPV	UAC	DPV	UAC
ElDiario.es	5.4	5.5	2.9	4.2	5.4	14
ElConfidencial.com	3.0	3.5	3.7	14.0	2.0	12
ElEspanol.com	3.9	1.0	3.5	10	9.4	13

Notes: DPV (Diverse points of view), UAC (Users asking clarifications).

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the significance of our findings, our study also has certain limitations. First, the study is based on data that was collected during a limited period and, even though the digital news outlets selected for the sample are ranked as one of the most visited and relevant ones in Spain, further research should be carried out in order to analyze data over a more extended period. These analyses should include data from other minority news outlets to increase the scope and obtain more detailed aspects of the discourse ethics behind the comments sections. Therefore, our findings cannot be automatically generalized to the entire state of online discourse within the Spanish digital media. It is important to continue exploring alternative and potentially new discursive perspectives inside and outside the outlet's informative boundaries. Second, the limited number of AI technologies available, such as neural networks for discourse analysis, poses a significant challenge for any scientist trying to analyze large chunks of data. In-depth machine learning could be used to process more dimensions of the data, study outcomes from the past, and master the capacity to collect, understand and subsequently trace previous language patterns to help make judgments in real-time.

7. Conclusions and Discussion

The analysis of the comments of the readers in all three news outlets allows us, in the first place, to conclude that the comments do not have a deliberative nature. Three out of four users (72.6%) only made one comment during the examined period. The presence of many unique comments precludes the existence of a fluid conversation between the readers. The significant number of individual users in the comments section fragments the debate. Moreover, while all members of the discussion have equal opportunities to post a comment, in almost of the comments sections of all the news outlets analyzed, a limited number of participants are responsible for the majority of the arguments and point of views expressed, which contributes to the monopolization of discourse by individuals and groups in online conversations (Jensen, 2016).

Second, the study reveals the low-quality profile of the debates that take place in the comments section of the news outlets. Still, most comments remain irrelevant to the issue being discussed, and a vast majority of users do not focus on the topic of the news story. Only 13.3% intend to argue the topic being discussed. Only a small number of users try to argue the point (7.8%). Likewise, users rarely endorse an argument of another user or mention or refer to other sources. The difference between the data collected for social media platforms may be due to the effectiveness of moderation algorithms which are in charge of ranking low-quality content not related to the discussed topic.

The degree of mutual respect in interaction, a vital element of the democratic value of the discussion where speakers consider each other as legitimate members of the dialogue (Papacharissi, 2004), was calculated based on the existence of incivility, profanity, and derogatory remarks toward other users. In this regard, the study shows that overall of 12.7% of all contributions contains incivilities. It is worth pointing out that previous scholarship has recorded high levels of incivility in online participatory spaces (Coe et al., 2014; Gervais, 2015); however, technological progress has allowed the emergence of more robust moderation systems and automatic moderation that have achieved the goal of keeping insults away from the comments section (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2010). Nonetheless, a significant number of negative comments still arise. Recognizing that there is a meager rate of deleted or moderated comments in online media, it seems clear that users try to avoid offending others directly and try to express their anger or hate with other rhetorical tactics, such as irony, sarcasm, and jokes. While insults are easily detected by filtering software and algorithms, and most of the time, they are recognized by automated moderators; demeaning dialect involves further rhetoric subjective assessment.

Finally, and related to the above, the study also shows that the comments section of digital news media and social networks have other specific patterns and features based on their distribution platforms. These include emojis, memes, or animated GIFs. They all are a form of graphic communication used for social commentary on a wide variety of topics (Meso-Ayerdi, Mendiguren-Galdospin, & Pérez-Dasilva, 2017) and their use allows users to synthesize an idea, scenario, or statement in a simple and agile way (Freire, 2016; Gómez-García, 2013).

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Media Roles in the Online News Domain: Authorities and Emergent Audience Brokers

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Abstract
This article empirically tests the role of legacy and digital-born news media, mapping the patterns of audience navigation across news sources and the relationship between news providers. We borrow tools from network science to bring evidence that suggest legacy news media retain control of the most central positions in the online news domain. Great progress has been made in discussing theoretically the impact of the Internet on the news media ecology. Less research attention, however, has been given to empirically testing changes in the role of legacy media and the rising prominence of digital-born outlets. To fill this gap, in this study we use the hyperlink-induced topic search algorithm, which identifies authorities by means of a hyperlink network, to show that legacy media are still the most authoritative sources in the media ecology. To further substantiate their dominant role, we also examine the structural position of news providers in the audience network. We gather navigation data from a panel of 30,000 people and use it to reproduce the network of patterns of news consumption. While legacy news media retain control of the brokerage positions for the general population, our analysis—focused on patterns of young news consumers—reveals that new digital outlets also occupy relevant positions to control the audience flow. The results of this study have substantive implications for our understanding of news organizations' roles and how they attain authority in the digital age.

Keywords
digital audience; digital-born media; hyperlinks; legacy media; network analysis; news; online news

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1. Introduction

Great progress has been made in discussing theoretically the impact of the Internet on the news media ecology. Less research attention, however, has been given to empirically testing changes in the role of legacy media and the rising prominence of digital-born outlets. The growth of the popularity of digital-born outlets as news providers (Nicholls, Shabbir, & Nielsen, 2016) and the increasing role of the Internet as a main access point for news consumption have motived scholars to contend that there has been a reconfiguration of media power. As a result, digital-born media might be challenging the classic monopoly of legacy brands as authoritative information providers and audience builders. Hence, according to some, new elites might be emerging (Castells, 2009; Chadwick, 2013; Couldry & Curran, 2003; Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Jarvis, 2016; Pavlik, 2001). Yet, whether this is the case or not remains largely untested. There are a few empirical studies to support this line of work (Meraz, 2009), and they are contested by evidence sug-

gesting that media functions, i.e., agenda setting or gatekeeping, are still in the hands of legacy media (Coleman & McCombs, 2007; Lee, 2007; Park, Ko, Lee, & Song, 2013). Following a convention in the literature, in this study the term legacy media refers to those outlets that predate the Internet era and the term digital-born media identifies news providers that do not have an offline counterpart.

Legacy media are struggling to deal with the endless technological upheaval and to secure their positions as leading information providers in the online domain (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Cagé, 2016; Downie & Schudson, 2009; Fenton, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2011). Their paper editions' readerships shrink and so do their revenues (cf. Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). At the same time, digital-only competitors make it more difficult for legacy media across geographies to engage a new loyal public, especially when it comes to paying for content and attracting a young target audience (Cage, Viaud, & Herve, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015; Suárez, 2020).

Latin America is one of the world regions where the birth and growth of digital-only media has been most dramatic profound (Salaverría, Sádaba, Breiner, & Warner, 2019). There, they are "shaking the market" with larger audience figures than those of legacy and well-established outlets (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016; Salaverría, 2016). In many of these countries, as well as in other parts of the world, digital-born outlets have also shown a faster adoption of innovation than their legacy counterparts. This ability has not only been recognized by legacy media but has also been highlighted in the meta-journalistic discourses that digital-born media have used to publicly present themselves as unique news sources in the online domain (Carlson & Usher, 2016).

In parallel to the rise of digital-born outlets, several examples speak to the efforts that legacy media are continuing to protect their role as the main information providers in the digital age (Castells, 2009; Chadwick, 2013; Cook, 1998; Garnham, 1995; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). In the UK, for instance, *The Independent* announced an unprecedented digital-only format movement ("The Independent becomes," 2016) and ceased its print edition. Similarly, one of the top Spanish news brands, *El País*, suggested the possibility of ending its paper edition in the short term (Caño, 2016). Finally, *The New York Times* and, more recently, the *Der Spiegel* commissioned innovation reports that contain detailed critical analyses regarding the organizations failing to successfully embrace the digital sphere ("Mitarbeiter fordern Revolution von unten," 2016; Wills, 2014). *The New York Times* acknowledged: "We have always cared about the reach and impact of our work, but we haven't done enough to crack that code in the digital era" (Wills, 2014, p. 3). Perhaps consistent with those concerns, the newspaper has recently looked closely for new talent from among the digital-born competitors (Franklin, 2018; Smith, 2020).

These examples illustrate the importance that legacy media give to the online domain. Nonetheless, citizens increasingly turn to the Internet—including social media—as their main access to political information, and in some countries they already prefer online sources for news rather than print editions or even television (Newman et al., 2019).

Underlying the actions of the legacy brands described above—all aimed at concentrating efforts on the web—there is a broad question related to the function that one of their main competitors, digital-born outlets, are playing in the provision of information. Certainly, in the current hybrid media system, there is a confluence of legacy and digital-born brands and a negotiation for the re-allocation of roles among them (Carlson, 2017; Chadwick, 2013). Yet, whether this implies a decline in the role of legacy media and a rise of digital-born outlets must be put to an empirical test.

This leads to the main question guiding the analysis that follows: Are legacy media the central actors in the online news domain? Their audience rates might prove they continue to be. Overall, in many regions in the world, legacy media still retain higher proportions of attention, measured in the number of unique visitors, compared with those of digital-born brands. However, we argue that the capacity for generating traffic is merely one factor that determines the relevance of a news source. To understand how and when news media attains authority in the online domain, it is necessary to identify those who hold central positions in the audience flow and are considered providers of unique content by digital audiences and by news providers themselves.

To assess media authority, research traditionally looked into collective narratives by journalists (Carlson, 2007; Zelizer, 1990). Later, Carlson (2017) noted that not a single variable can explain how journalists, and therefore news media, attain authority. In his seminal attempt to explain journalistic authority, he instead advocates for a relational perspective that considers an array of actors inside and outside the newsroom, e.g., reporters, sources, audiences, critics. In line with this theoretical work, we propose an observational approach to evaluate the role of legacy and digital-born organizations from a two-dimensional perspective. We look at the level of authority that news sources confer to each other and how audiences navigate them, thereby revealing their dominance of the online audience flow.

We assess the centrality of news sources by looking at the two main dimensions of the online news domain. First, we analyse the supply side by reproducing the network of hyperlink connections among news providers and measuring the authority of the news media. For this purpose, we draw on the methodological framework by Kleinberg (1999) and previous work by Weber and Monge (2011). More specifically, we borrow tools from network science to measure the centrality of news outlets in the flow of news information. We analyse the extent to which news sources quote others' content, which

is a proxy to identify the level of authority that one conferred to the others. This approach has largely been used in the field of information retrieval and by popular search engines, e.g., Google, to return meaningful results (Newman, 2010). Recently, it has been applied to fact-check news sources too (Kosslyn & Yu, 2017). Our goal here is bringing evidence to assess whether legacy media retain control of the most central positions in the online news domain by measuring whether they are endorsed as authorities, i.e., sources of reference by their peers.

Second, to further substantiate the centrality of the news sources, we assess their role on the demand side of the news domain and the flow of audience across them. We gathered online navigation data from a representative panel of 30,000 people in Spain and reproduce their patterns of news consumption drawing on previous work in the field of audience networks (Ksiazek, 2011; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). In doing this, we test whether the most central sources in the provision of news content also hold central positions to control the audience flow. We offer this analysis in the Spanish context because it allows a comparative dimension to the few empirical analyses on the centrality of news media which are largely focused on the US (Meraz, 2009; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Meyer, 2004; Weber & Monge, 2011).

Third, we review the previous work on the impact of the Internet in the news media ecology and how legacy media have retained attained authority while facing the emergence of digital-born outlets. We also offer a presentation of the Spanish media sector. Fourth, we introduce the data and methods and discuss their potential to tackle the relationships among different types of news organizations and measure media centrality in the news domain. Fifth, in the results section, we present the outcomes of this role identification analysis. Finally, we discuss our results and their implications for the theoretical accounts about how the Internet is reconfiguring the digital news domain.

2. News Organizations in the Digital Era

The patterns of interaction between legacy and digital-born media and the re-allocation of roles among them have lately spurred much interest. In the early years of the 21st century, Dutton, Gillett, McKnight, and Peltu (2004) already noted the disruptive impact of digital technologies on the reconfiguration of power among several types of actors and organizations. Media institutions have not been an exception. Some scholars have argued that the web has created new spaces for power (Bennett, 2003), new hierarchies have emerged in the online domain (Mansell, 2004) and, ultimately, the web has recast the roles of actors in the media ecology (Carlson, 2007; Gurevitch et al., 2009; Tandoc & Jenkins, 2017).

The web gives audiences greater access to a broader range of facts, data, and opinions and changes the traditional journalistic standards for the provision of news (Fortunati et al., 2009; Riordan, 2014). Communicating what matters to the public is no longer a lineal process from sources to journalist to be finally transmitted to mass audiences. Instead, the web has created a new distinctive scenario where providing information and news is no longer the exclusive task of legacy organizations (Croteau, 2006). The mass-self-communication system (Castells, 2007) or the many-to-many model of information theoretically puts the smallest news providers on an equal footing with the transnational conglomerates (Rheingold, as cited in Fenton, 2010). Consequently, people do not only rely on traditional media to make sense of the myriad of information sources around them. Information control or gatekeeping, according to this strand of research, is now shared either with audiences that perform as content producers or with a wide range of new actors, some of whom act as journalists, providing newsworthy content too. We categorize them here under the label of digital-born outlets, e.g., blogs, news sites, aggregators or niche outlets.

Before all of these changes, legacy media took advantage of scarcity, exclusivity and control of information. They did so for much of the 20th century (Lewis, 2012, p. 311) to secure their positions as elites in the political communication process. They controlled information dissemination in a structured environment and shaped the social order which ultimately allowed them to operate with some authority (Robinson, 2007, p. 307).

Traditionally, to reify their authoritative status to audiences, journalists from legacy media have used narrative and placed themselves at the centre of stories (Zelizer, 1990). Through meta-journalistic discourse, they have also set boundaries and excluded other actors from playing a role in the news sector (Carlson, 2017). They have identified and credited those who have the authority to provide news information and those who do not; frequently overlooking the role of the audience in legitimizing that authority.

Digital technologies have, however, shaken up the traditional role of the legacy media and redefined who attains authority in the online domain. This has necessarily broadened the understanding of media authority. With the advent of the web, digital-born outlets emerged as new empowered actors (Singer, 2007). Some of them initially established themselves in opposition to the legacy vehicles for information production (Carlson, 2007). Certainly, they challenged the traditional role of legacy outlets and even the very notion of journalistic professionalism (Singer, 2003). In turn, legacy media received them with a combination of uncertainty (Tandoc & Jenkins, 2017) and resistance to legitimize them as authoritative sources.

Similar to legacy organizations, digital-born outlets can reach a mass audience. Although they have much smaller structures, even a blog by a single author can reach thousands of people today. Notably, the web has radically lowered the cost of distribution (Cage et al., 2015). Their reach and also their relevance, especially during major political events, are a proxy to understand

their ability to challenge the monopoly of media authority, which was once exclusively attained by legacy outlets (Majó-Vázquez, Zhao, Nielsen, 2017; Majó-Vázquez, Zhao, Nurse, & Nielsen, 2017).

Among all the changes brought about by the advent of the Internet in the media sector, Livingstone considers that potentially the most radical change is the shift from one-way mass communication towards more interactive communication (1999, p. 61). Along these lines, digital-born outlets have given an active role to audiences in the production of information. They have blurred the distinction between producers of news content and the audiences themselves (Croteau, 2006), a relationship well-established for decades by legacy media to consolidate their authority.

Digital-born outlets have engaged diverse actors in horizontal and conversational practices to filter and promote content, blending broadcasting with social conventions (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, p. 142). They have shared and transformed journalistic routines, once considered exclusive to legacy news media, like gatekeeping and agenda setting, with a broader set of actors and the audience. Digital-born outlets have diversified standard journalistic narratives, formats and rituals. They provide easily sharable content (Riordan, 2014), multimedia news products, and take advantage of new forms of collaboration, analytic tools and sources of data (Anderson et al., 2012).

Alternative sources of funding have also become a growing mechanism to differentiate new and legacy outlets and to interact and engage with the public. Beyond the classical sources of media funding, such as advertisements or even government subsidies (Brogi, Ginsborg, Ostling, Parcu, & Simunjak, 2015; Colino, 2013), digital-born outlets have also sought alternative sources of income to sustain their journalistic practices, highlighting their independence and increasing audience participation.

All in all, digital-born outlets have been agents of innovation (Carlson & Usher, 2016) and, therefore, have changed how journalism can be understood and how media authority in the news domain is attained. Interestingly, they have addressed audiences by means of metadiscourses where they create distance from legacy models of journalism and stress their ability to construct ideal-types of news thanks to the affordances of the web (Carlson & Usher, 2016). Yet again, whether all this has positioned them as central actors in the news domain and has allowed them to challenge the authoritative role of legacy media has not been empirically studied. We aim to fill this gap.

2.1. The Spanish News Media Landscape

To this end, we focus on the Spanish online news domain which has also been affected by the above mentioned changes. It is important to note that the Spanish media outlets are overtly partisan (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and the media system greatly suffered from the impact of the economic crisis that hit the country from 2008 to 2012. Since then, legacy media have struggled to overcome both the media crisis and the economic crisis. Between 2008 and 2013, the unemployment rate for Spanish journalists rose 132%, the communications sector lost 11,151 jobs and 284 news media outlets shut down (Press Association of Madrid, 2013). However, on the upside of that adverse scenario, 458 new outlets were founded during that very same period. The vast majority of them were digital-born (Press Association of Madrid, 2015) and led by journalists who used to work for legacy organizations (Minder, 2015; Schoepp, 2016). Prominent examples are *Elespanol.com*, founded by the former director of the second largest legacy outlet in Spain, *El Mundo*, and *ctxt.es*, founded by former senior journalists from *El País*.

In sum, theoretical accounts of the reallocation of roles in the digital domain contend digital-born outlets have shown their ability to transition from volume to value, and that authority has been conferred to them by building relationships with people based on relevance (Jarvis, 2016). If that is the case, they should hold central positions in the news media domain. This leads to the following research question:

> RQ1: To what extent are digital-born outlets central actors in the flow of news content by being recognized as authoritative sources of information by other news providers?

Yet, as we have argued, we propose a multidimensional approach to the centrality of the news media. Therefore, we assess whether authoritative sources of information also have central positions in the control of audience flow. Central sources of information should not only be regarded as unique as authorities by their peers but they should also have a certain potential control over the way audiences navigate the news domain. This idea is illustrated in network theory by measuring betweenness centrality of nodes. Media outlets with higher betweenness centrality lie on the audience shortest path between other news sources and therefore may have considerable influence over the overall audience behaviour. This leads to our following sub-question:

> RQ1.2: To what extent do legacy and digital-born outlets hold brokerage positions in the audience network?

Finally, we expect that the underlying structure of the audience network differs if we consider specific patterns of news consumption across demographics. Studies that look at the use of news by young generations unveil distinctive media diets. Some have pointed out that legacy status is less important in shaping their online navigation (Taneja, Wu, & Edgerly, 2018) and that they are more keen on using social networks and mobile devices

to keep up with current affairs (Newman et al., 2019). They are also less likely to remember news sources' names (Mitchell, Gottfried, Shearer, & Lu, 2017), which might imply that brand awareness, which is especially important for legacy outlets, is less effective in attracting and engaging with younger audiences. Further, digital-born outlets are setting up designated channels to reach young audiences, which, in turn, increases the competition against legacy brands. In light of this specific scenario, our final research question examines the role of news providers across different age groups:

> RQ1.3: Do legacy and digital-born outlets differ in their brokerage positions when considering different age groups?

3. Data and Methods

3.1. News Network

In this study, we use two different techniques to analyse two types of networks: the hyperlink network, also called news network, and the audience network. In total, we study six networks—five audience networks representing news consumption patterns of different age groups and one hyperlink network.

The news network represents the total number of hyperlinks that news media send to each other and is weighted and directed. Here, nodes are news media outlets, and an edge between two nodes exists if there is at least one hyperlink sent from one outlet to an external source. Two media outlets are disconnected if none of them has cited content from the other. The weight of the edges equals the total number of hyperlinks among each pair of nodes.

We argue that a hyperlink is a conservative measure of the authority that news media confer to competitors. It has been shown that linking has a very high cost barrier in the media ecology. In line with the *walled-garden philosophy*, news media rarely link to competitors to avoid guiding audience attention outside its boundaries (Chung, Nam, & Stefanone, 2012; Larsson, 2013; Napoli, 2008). Therefore, following previous research in the field of information retrieval (Kleinberg, Kumar, Raghavan, Rajagopalan, & Tomkins, 1999; Weber & Monge, 2011), we assume that when they do send a hyperlink to another news outlet, it is to acknowledge the unique value of its content. Algorithms behind search engines also determine the level of authoritativeness of a site by, among other indicators, the number of inlinks received from peers specialized in pointing to sources of information (hub) (Newman, 2010). Additionally, outlinks have also been used in the journalistic sector as proxies for trusted sources of information and, consequently, to build measures of media trust (Bale, Walmsley, Wustermann, Ericson, & Barber, 2018).

To map the news network, we start by selecting the top 44 news outlets in Spain in February 2015. We used Alexa rankings ("Top sites in Spain," 2015) for selecting them. To test the accuracy of the data, we compared the initial ordering with a list provided by ComScore, the official digital audience meter in Spain. The correlation of the two rankings was 0.90. To this list, we added top digital outlets in Spain using the ComScore ranking. We ended up with a final list of 100 news outlets that we input as seeds in commercial software for crawlings (Voson). The web crawl was supervised to ensure that we extracted the maximum number of incoming and outgoing links from the deepest level. The process not only involved snowballing from seed sites to get outgoing hyperlinks but also querying a search engine API (Bing) to collect incoming hyperlinks. Our approach is consistent with previous research that shows that selecting seed sites according to well-established prominence (in our case audience reach) minimizes the bias of rendering peripheral sites as central (Weber & Monge, 2011). After page-grouping subdomains with their parent sites and pruning those nodes that were not news providers, the final network has 100 nodes and almost 800 edges or connections. Table 1 summarizes its main descriptive statistics (see Supplementary File for further descriptive analyses).

3.2. Audience Networks

Finally, we built our four audience networks in November 2015. We drew on the long history of audience duplication data and more recently online audience duplication data to define the ties in these networks as the shared audience among news media outlets and the nodes as news sources (Cooper, 1996; Goodhardt & Ehrenberg, 1969; Goodhardt, Ehrenberg, & Collins, 1987; Ksiazek, 2011; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Thus, in the four audience networks, ties stand for the total audience overlap between media *i* and media *j*. These networks are directed and weighted. Previous work in this field has also leverage on similar data to calculate the weight of the ties of audience networks as the amount of audience shared by news sources (Taneja & Webster, 2016). Notably, in this study we keep the direction of the ties too. This offers more granular information about audience behaviour (see Ksiazek, 2011, for further discussion on directed and undirected ties in audience networks). Because our data collection process for mapping the hyperlink and the audience networks had to take place at different points in time, we tested the volatility of the audience data by comparing media reach across a one-year period. According to the resulting correlations—the lowest score equals 0.90—we can assume fairly stable audience behaviour during the period of time that our study spans, with no major changes in the patterns of news consumption between February 2015 and November 2015.

We gathered the audience data from ComScore (Interactive Adversiting Bureau, 2011). This is a private provider which tracks the browsing behaviour of a representative panel of 30,000 Spanish people. To check the accuracy of the measurements, it combines observations

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of news and audience networks.

Statistic	News network Feb-15		Audience networks Nov-15	
	Full	News network	Total audience	Young audience
Size	16,659	100	108	93
Edges	32,628	799	10,387	8464
Density	0.000	0.081	0.890	0.989
Reciprocity	0.046	0.471	0.980	0.989
Clustering	0.006	0.367	0.930	1.000
Max. Inlinks	1223	32	38	92
Min. Inlinks	0	0	106	91
Max. Outlinks	704	49	0	92
Min. Outlinks	0	0	106	0
Max. Instrength	2793	1173	44150	5199
Min. Instrength	0	0	0	0
Max. Outstrength	1282	447	42120	2946
Min. Outstrength	0	0	0	0
Assortativity	−0.615	−0.166	−0.11	0

coming from the panel with other indicators, drawn from direct audience metrics from news media collected by a separate agency (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, 2014). The audience networks represent observed data instead of reported news media diets, which have proven to be overstated and result in less accurate analyses (Guess, 2015; Prior, 2009).

Our audience provider only offers audience overlapping data for those sites that have been visited by a minimum of 16 panelists in a given month. As a consequence, the total number of nodes in the four networks varies. We reproduced the online audience navigation patterns for the general population and people aged between 18–24, 25–34, 35–54 and more than 55 years old.

3.3. Methods

Our main goal is to identify the role of news providers in the digital domain. We define as authoritative sources of information those media outlets that are frequently linked by their peers and by doing so we can provide evidence to identify sources of information that potentially control the flow of news. To this end, we use two different techniques borrowed from network science. We first measure the level of authority of news media using the hyperlink-induced topic search algorithm developed by Kleinberg (1999). Following previous work in the area of Link Analysis Rank algorithm, we assume that a hyperlink from node *i* to node *j* denotes an endorsement for the quality of the page *j* (Borodin, Roberts, Rosenthal, & Tsaparas, 2005; Kleinberg et al., 1999; Weber & Monge, 2011) and that the authority score is a proxy to identify the most central news sources online.

The hyperlink-induced topic search algorithm provides a two-level propagation scheme, where endorsement is conferred on authorities through hubs. In other words, every page has two identities: The hub identity captures the quality of the page as a pointer of useful news sources, and the authority identity, our main concept of interest, captures the quality of the page as a resource itself (Borodin et al., 2005, p. 235). We identify news providers' roles as authorities and hubs. The former are news media, which provide content highly cited by their peers, and the latter are news media that cite the worthiest sources of news information. Formally, the authority centrality of a vertex is defined to be proportional to the sum of the hubs centralities of the vertices that point to it:

$$x_i = \alpha \sum_j A_{ij} y_j,$$

where A_{ij} is an element of the weighted adjacency matrix, y_j stands for the hub centrality and α is a constant. Consistently, the hub centrality of a vertex is proportional to the sum of the authority centralities of the vertices it points to:

$$y_i = \beta \sum_j A_{ji} x_j,$$

where β is also a constant (for more information see Kleinberg, 1999; Newman, 2010; Weber & Monge, 2011). Additionally, we use a random benchmark known as the 'configuration multi-edge model' in the network literature (Sagarra, Font-Clos, Pérez-Vicente, & Díaz-Guilera, 2014). It is specifically designed for weighted networks and matches the strength distribution of our news and audience networks. This benchmark aims to assess the significance of the authority and hub scores previously calculated and its departure from what we could expect if the hyperlinks in the news network were sent randomly. The null model is based on the reconstruction of 1,000 random networks with exactly the same strength distribution as our observed news network and maximally random in all other respects. Because our news

network is directed, the null model is defined separately for incoming and outgoing ties (for more information see Sagarra et al., 2014).

We operationalize the role of the news sources based on multidimensional definition. Therefore, along with the authority analysis, we also assessed the potential control of news media over the audience flow. To this end, we measured the betweenness centrality score of all the news sites in the four audience networks that represent patterns of news consumption across ages. This approach allows bringing evidence to the role of the news providers as audience brokers across demographics. Formally, the brokerage scores are roughly equal to the number of the shortest paths between others that pass through a node. More interestingly, though, the resulting ranking of brokers for each network will identify those news providers that have higher potential control over the audience flow in each age group and can thereby engage wider audiences.

Since Freeman (1979) conceptualized the concept of brokerage, in the sociological literature there is a significant amount of work devoted to the study of this term in social networks (Coleman, 1988; Gonzalez-Bailon & Wang, 2013). We employ here the formalization of betweenness centrality by Opsahl, Agneessens, and Skvoretz (2010), which generalizes the shortest path calculations for weighted networks matching the nature of our data. In other words, we not only took into account the shortest paths between nodes in our audience network but also the amount of audience that flows through them. As a result, our measure not only accounts for those news sources that more frequently mediate visits to other news sources but also for those that receive more visits themselves. In order to determine whether the brokerage scores are statistically significant (not due to random fluctuations of the audience flow), we use again the configuration multi-edge model.

4. Results

The identification of the media authorities, or the most reputable sources of news content in the digital domain, yields evidence that legacy news outlets broadly control this strategic position at the individual level. Figure 1 shows the authority scores of the two types of news providers under study: legacy and digital-born

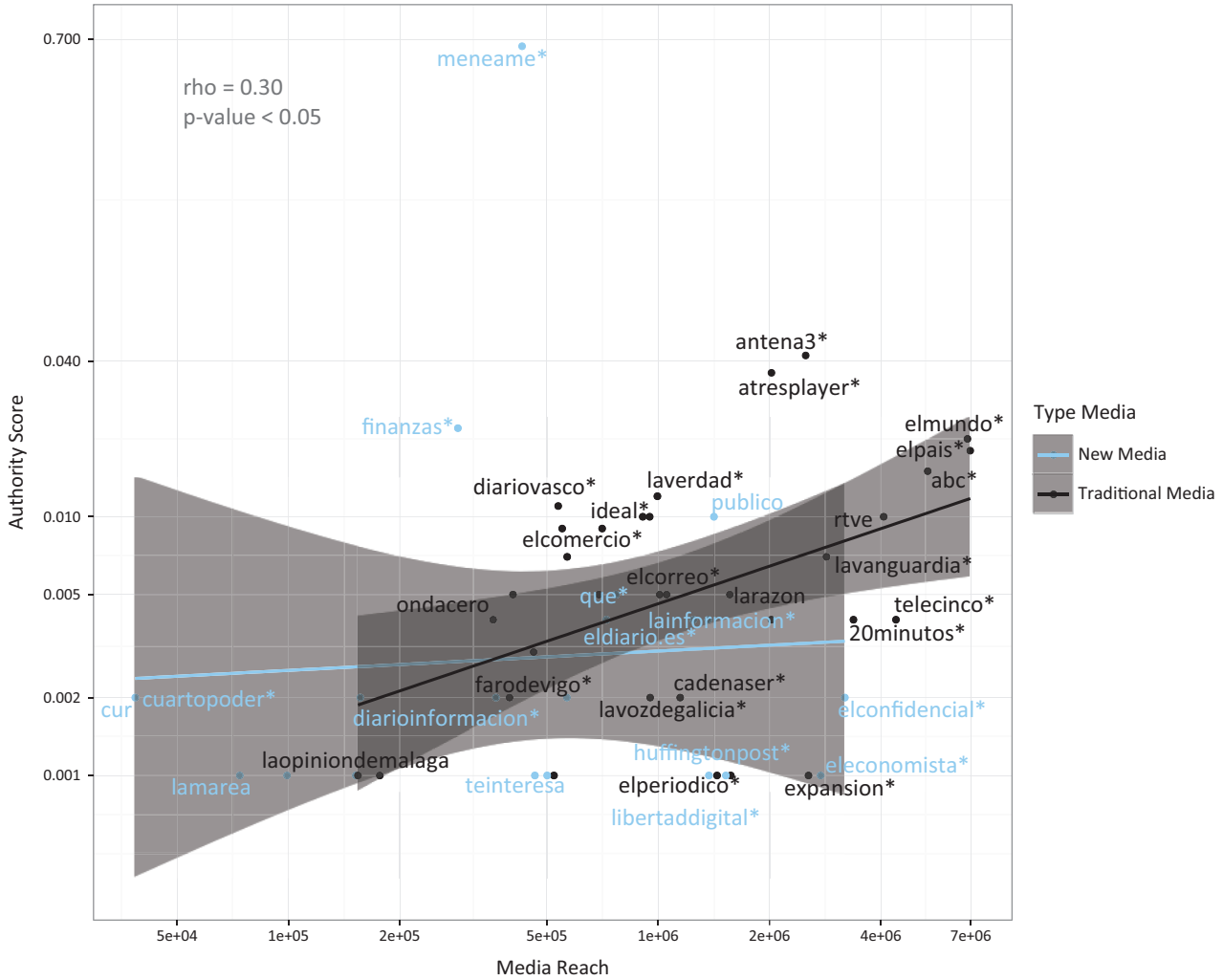

Figure 1. Association between authority scores in the news network and audience reach. Note: * significant score.

media. The distribution of the scores suggests that legacy brands are more frequently considered sources of valuable content, i.e., more authoritative than digital-born media. There are only two exceptions. Among the top 10 authorities identified in the hyperlink network, we found the aggregator *Meneame.es* and the business outlet *Finanzas.es*. One plausible explanation for the outstanding position of *Meneame.es* is that it is pointed to by the biggest hubs in the network, like the broadcasters *Antena3.com* and *Atresplayer.com*, amongst others. These results allow us to answer our first research question.

As mentioned, we have analysed the extent to which the observed authority scores are different from what we would expect if the hyperlinks of the news network were sent randomly—significant scores are labelled * in Figure 1. Interestingly, though, we have also assessed the significance of the difference in means of authority scores of new and legacy news outlets. According to our results using bootstrapping techniques for non-independent observations, the type of news provider is not significant to explain levels of authority in the online domain (see Figure A3 in Supplementary File). In other words, the individual significant differences previously identified do not persist at the category level.

Additionally, in Figure 1 we can also see that the reach of the news outlets, i.e., the total amount of visits media receive, is only slightly associated with authority scores (rho = 0.30, p-value < 0.05). Hence, the number of visits that one outlet receives does not offer a complete explanation for its media authority score. Rather, the results suggest it is the underlying structure of connections that confer legacy media with authority. Their ability to generate valuable content attracts other media's attention and grants them the most central positions in the news network.

By means of the hyperlink-induced topic search algorithm, we have also identified hubs in the news network, i.e., pointers to useful information. This analysis reveals that there are more digital-born media acting as pointers to useful news sources, i.e., hubs, than as authorities. Among them, we find *Libertadigital.com*, *Elconfidencial.com*, and *Diarioinformacion.com*. Some news outlets, mainly broadcasters like *Antena3.com*, *Atresplayer.com* and *Lasexta.com*, play a double role in the news domain; not only are they relevant authorities but they also specialize in identifying the most important news sources on the web.

To answer our second research question—to find out which type of news provider is in control of the audience flow—we have measured the weighted betweenness centrality of the outlets included in our study. More precisely, we have determined the differences in the brokerage power of legacy and digital-born media across demographics. Figure 2 shows the results of the analysis. As suggested in this analysis, the control of the flow of audiences is almost a monopoly of the legacy organizations. They hold top brokerage positions in each age group.

Yet, when we drill down to young audiences' navigation patterns, those aged 18 to 24, the analysis reveals that digital-born media obtain, on average, a higher betweenness centrality score than in other

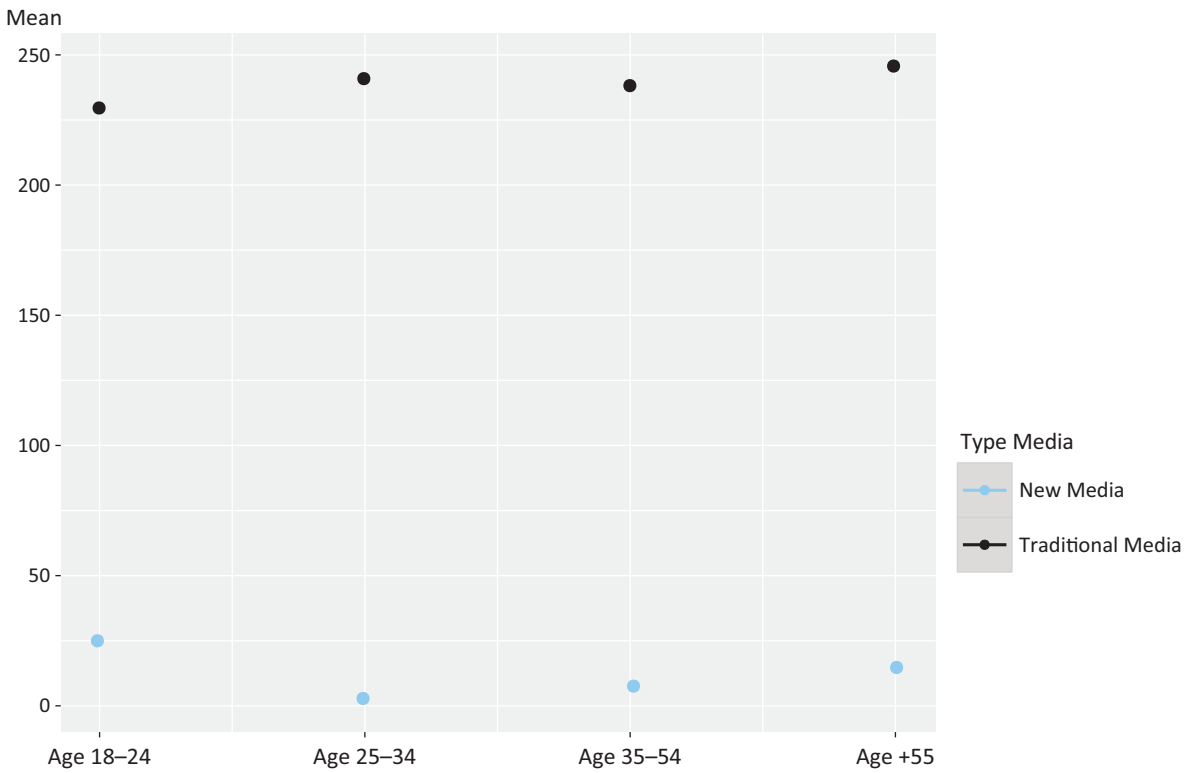

Figure 2. Mean of betweenness centrality scores in the audience networks by different age groups.

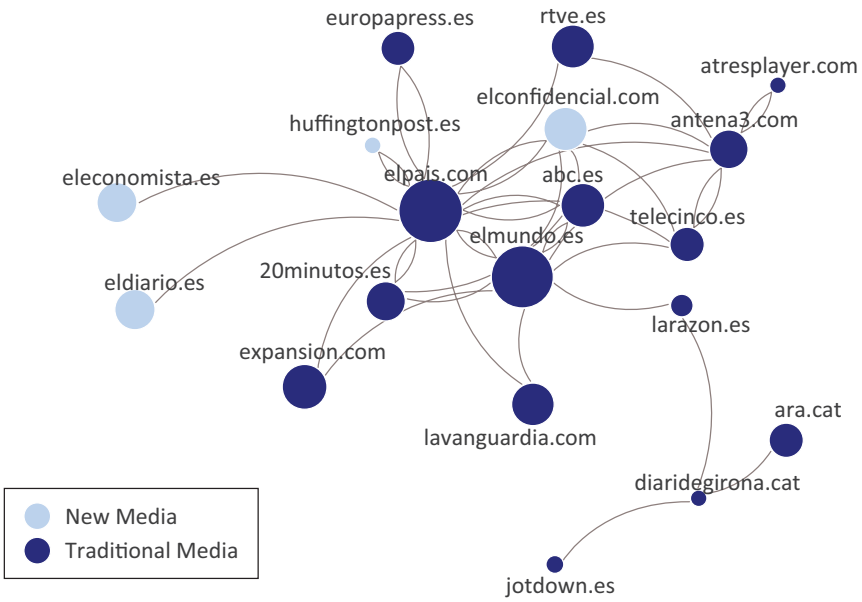

Figure 3. Audience brokers in the young audience network.

age groups. According to our results, three digital-born outlets are playing the role of top brokers for young audiences: *Elconfidencial.com*, *Eldiario.es* and *Eleconomista.es*. Figure 3 maps their positions within the strongest connected component, i.e., the central part of the young audience network. The figure shows the most important brokers. Here, nodes represent news media outlets and their size is proportional to their brokerage power. To obtain the strongest connected component of the structure, we have iteratively removed the weakest connections of the young audience network, a process known as percolation in network science (Borge-Holthoefer & Gonzalez-Bailon, 2015). The advantage of this method is that it reveals the areas with the highest levels of audience overlapping and helps us to better understand patterns of news navigation between new and legacy media.

Overall, and in line with previous research, we can see that patterns of young audience navigation differ from those of the general public (see Figure 4). More specifically, and to answer our final research question, young people confer to digital-born sites a central role in their media diets. These types of news sources compete for the control of young audience flow with legacy brands. They occupy core positions within the network and have major roles in the mediation of news attention.

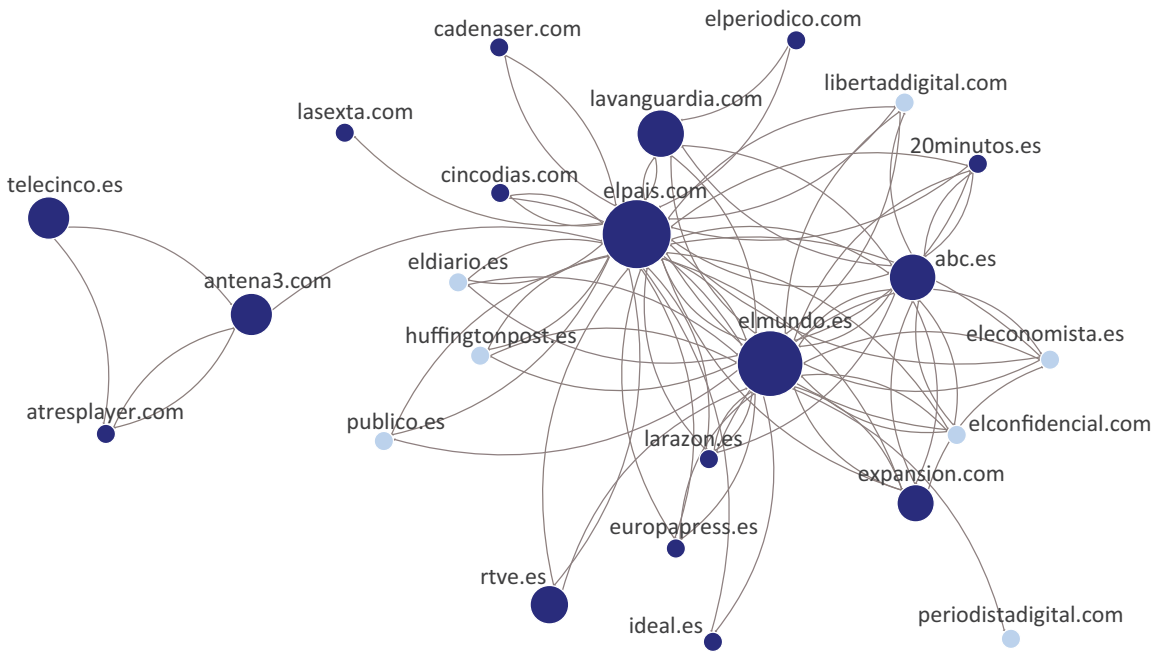

Figure 4. Audience brokers in the general audience network.

Of note, and to properly interpret these results, one must take into consideration that the audience networks represent aggregated news consumption behaviour. Hence, they do not provide the actual path that people follow when navigating more than two consecutive sites in the news domain. Nonetheless, it does provide the best representation of the likeliest path that at the aggregated level news users will follow.

Finally, Figure 4 shows the distribution of brokerage power in the general audience network, and it is congruent with our previous findings. It shows the greater role of legacy outlets—see the greater size of dark-blue coloured nodes—as mediators of audience behaviour in the online news domain. In light of this evidence, we argue that offline heritage is still a key element to understanding media centrality in the news domain.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights that a negotiation of roles among digital-born outlets and legacy media is taking place in the online news domain. We provide evidence that legacy media are regarded as the most authoritative sources and that their role does not hinge on their reach. Also, legacy media retain much of the control of the audience flow. However, young audiences, who exhibit distinctive news consumption patterns, confer brokerage power to native digital outlets. Hence, these new entrants occupy central positions for the control of the audience flow too.

Previously, the literature had already highlighted tensions between new digital actors and legacy news organizations (Carlson, 2007, 2017; Singer, 2003; Tandoc & Jenkins, 2017). Before the advent of the web, it noted and assessed the efforts in journalistic practice to delimitate the boundaries of the profession and to assert its authority as qualified sources for news information (Zelizer, 1990). Narratives techniques were used by journalists to enhance their authority and preserve the centrality of legacy media in the information flow. Undoubtedly, the control of the means of production and distribution favoured that goal. As noted elsewhere, the profession wanted to limit the access of new actors and preserve the monopoly of the authority of legacy media (Singer, 2003). Interestingly, this same rhetorical technique that was used by legacy media later served digital-born outlets to assert their authority and the uniqueness of the news content they started offering (Carlson & Usher, 2016; Park, 2009).

However, the web soon lowered the cost of the production and distribution of news. Legacy media then faced a hard reality: limiting and controlling the entrance of new players was not a realistic goal. Mainly because, worldwide, audiences have recognized the value of digital-born outlets which have been keener on embracing innovation and differentiating themselves from legacy players not only through narratives but also modes of participation. Interestingly, audiences have legitimated new processes to produce and distribute information brought by digital-born outlets and, thereby, have conferred authority to digital-born outlets (Carlson, 2017).

The extent to which these changes have challenged the monopoly of legacy organizations, though, was not previously tackled in our field from an empirical perspective. Here we have proposed an observational approach to fill this gap. In this study, building on a multidimensional approach for measuring media authority, we have argued that the role of most prominent news media in the online domain hinges on the dominance of authoritative and broker positions in the news and audience network respectively. We have mapped the network structure between news providers, which has offered a useful lens to interpret the actual underlying relationships among news outlets based on their hyperlink structure. Moreover, we have assessed the extent to which audiences have legitimized the new entrants and accepted their journalistic knowledge (Carlson, 2017)—and whether, in doing so, the monopoly of the centrality of the legacy media has been challenged.

Overall, the contribution of our study is twofold. First, it offers an empirical framework that can be applied regardless of the media context to unveil influential relationships in the media ecology. In doing so, it helps to advance our understanding of how the Internet impacts the role of legacy media. Second, this article contributes to the literature on the reconfiguration of the media ecosystem by providing direct evidence on the role of legacy media as compared to that of digital-born outlets. Our results suggest that the latter are still far from displacing traditional brand outlets, whose stronger offline reputation may be securing their central role in the online news domain. Yet the youngest audiences are exerting their influence as catalysts for change.

It has been beyond the scope of this study to compare at the macro-level the structure of the online news domain. Yet previous research, focused on the overall web, suggests that regional and linguistic differences might be shaping the production and consumption of news (Taneja, 2016; Wu & Ackland, 2014). In fact, a visual inspection of the news audience network would suggest it too. Future research can build upon this work to provide an evidence-based answer to these questions.

Finally, some limitations deserve consideration. Our data represents a snapshot of the news domain, and a temporal analysis might be necessary to account for variations in the positions of the news media across time. Additionally, future studies exploring the structural mechanisms underlying betweenness centrality should also consider more refined measures of audience attention than total audience visits, e.g., total minutes spent on news content. Regardless of these, we believe this study makes a significant empirical contribution to the study of the media's changing roles in the online news domain.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary File

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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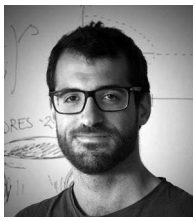

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Article

Between Self-Regulation and Participatory Monitoring: Comparing Digital News Media Accountability Practices in Spain

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Abstract
In recent years, the accountability practices of digital journalism have gone from constituting an intimate and self-regulatory system of journalistic culture to a complex process that is increasingly external and open to the public (Fengler, Eberwein, Mazzoleni, Porlezza, & Russ-Mohl, 2014; Suárez-Villegas, Rodríguez-Martínez, Mauri-Ríos, & López-Meri, 2017). In this context, values and goals may remain diverse, arguably linked to idiosyncratic elements which often open a gap between traditional and more contemporary newsroom models. Following a qualitative approach, this study examines online media accountability instruments from a functional perspective, dividing its influence in three temporal phases of news production (Heikkilä et al., 2012). In this way, instruments that hold journalists responsible for their work are explored in four leading online news media from Spain: two digital native outlets (*Eldiario.es* and *ElConfidencial.com*) and two legacy outlets (*ElPais.com* and *ElMundo.es*). In addition to this observation, in-depth interviews are conducted with staff members in charge of audience management to explore the inner routines and protocols that determine the efficacy of such aspirations. Our work reveals the preponderant role of instruments focused on the actor and production transparency that the studied media implement to fulfill their responsibility, especially when compared with the weakened self-regulation instruments. The answers of the interviewees stress the difficulties they face in managing participatory forms of accountability and disclose tensions between different strategies, as well as other structural factors that are discussed as essential for the consolidation of these deontological initiatives.

Keywords
citizen participation; deontology; digital journalism; journalism ethics; journalistic culture; media accountability; self-regulation; transparency

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1. Introduction

The accountability of the media is a normative concept on which attempts to balance media freedom and responsibility with society converge; a process that defines "how the media answer, to whom and for what" (Min, 2015, p. 1). As in the early 1940s, the Hutchins Commission's report suggested that press freedom should be subject to the media's commitment to provide a public service that, from professional ethics, overcomes the limitations and defects of the liberal paradigm inspired by Mill, in which the freedom of the market is the best guarantee for the free circulation of ideas. Besides, media must evaluate the considerations provided in constitutions, bodies of laws and other forms of public regulation that, in democratic societies, ensure the correction of these distortions. Media accountability based on legal texts is usually particularly effective in

the protection of individual rights, "when property is involved and where liability for specific forms of harm to an individual is at issue" (McQuail, 2003, p. 266).

To safeguard their autonomy from political and economic influence, journalistic organizations promote their own media accountability systems, understood as "any non-state means of making media responsible to the public" (Bertrand, 2000, p. 108) through techniques such as training, evaluation, monitoring and feedback. Thanks to them, they improve their public image and raise quality standards, through a set of voluntary practices that compel them to act according to self-regulation principles and structures, especially before internal peers of the organization itself, but also before external professional bodies (McQuail, 2003). In the complex context in which contemporary journalism develops, self-regulation is not only the way in which news institutions protect their activity from the interference of external powers, but also serves to preserve trust, the true social capital of journalism (Fengler, 2012).

This professional accountability is complemented by a public accountability that seeks to invigorate the links with the citizens, offering answers and collaborative ways for coregulation, and it is in this sense that it "encompasses inviting dialogue with the public about journalistic behavior" (Friend & Singer, 2015, p. xix). Audiences using digital platforms are not only information recipients, but they also actively interact, debate, create, communicate, and share information. In this way, active and conscious audiences can play an influential role in holding the media accountable to professional and public stakeholders by monitoring and criticizing whether media content follows ethical standards and journalistic values, and honors audience interests (Bhakta Acharya, 2015).

The media ecosystem that emerges after the 'participatory turn,' where anyone can publish, increases the need to legitimize journalistic work, which leads to the radicalization and exacerbation of media accountability instruments (MAIs) and transparency efforts (Eide, 2017) of which digital media take advantage (Fengler, Eberwein, Mazzoleni, Porlezza, & Russ-Mohl, 2014). While MAIs can be effective in checking whether news organizations and their journalists act in accordance with professional standards, showing in a transparent manner the details of the newsmaking process would contribute to consolidating their credibility. However, good journalism, like other democratic practices, often involves non-transparent activities—such as refusing to disclose sources—so professional ethics should not be restricted to a culture of transparency (Ward, 2013).

The framework of assumptions and norms of pre-digital journalistic ethics in which these practices are based remains fully valid in the digital scenario (García-Avilés, 2014), in which the initial paradigm of social responsibility that was born with the Hutchins Commission (focused on limitation) has turned toward a new one in which citizen participation emerges as an amendment to the inefficiencies of traditional mechanisms (Palau-Sampio, 2017). Of course, audience-inclusive models of accountability enhance one of the main weaknesses of self-regulation mechanisms, by giving space to that fraction of the audience that has sufficient interest to evaluate the journalistic performance. As a result, individual and organizational profiles on social media convey forms of contact and publications that invite readers to be involved in these participatory monitoring tasks, which entails a marginal cost in terms of individual effort, but which, cumulatively, can impact greatly on the professionals' routines (Fengler, 2012). In 2017, the publisher of *The New York Times*, Arthur Sulzberger, justified the disappearance of its ombudsperson after 15 years of activity referring precisely to the competencies of digital citizenship: "Today, our followers on social media and our readers across the Internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be" (as cited in Gold & Pompeo, 2017).

2. MAIs in the Spanish Online News Media Context

MAIs have been present in the Spanish digital news media since their birth in the mid-1990s, and this digital environment has favored the presence of certain instruments focused on self-regulation, transparency and supervision of information quality, in which the participation of users plays a decisive role (Mauri-Ríos & Ramon-Vegas, 2015; Suárez-Villegas, Rodríguez-Martínez, Mauri-Ríos, & López-Meri, 2017). The Spanish media ecosystem showed in previous research a lack of collective concern to advance in this area (Campos-Domínguez & Redondo-García, 2016), consistent, in turn, with the perception among journalists themselves, who doubt that online news media better serve accountability than legacy ones (Suárez-Villegas, 2015). Thus, the national situation was initially characterized by the low impact of these practices and their limited use by citizens (Alsius & Salgado, 2010), within an "asymmetric landscape" (Alsius, Mauri-Ríos, & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2011) that is a result of the different journalistic cultures that still coexist today in this territory (Suárez-Villegas et al., 2017).

All these deontological initiatives always seem modeled "by the social, technological, and economic structure of news media" (Ward, 2015, p. 347), factors that, precisely, often differentiate many newer digital-born news media from well-established legacy media. Spain has a rich and dynamic digital news scene: of the national online media active in 2018, 35% were digital natives compared to 50.9% legacy outlets (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa, & Breiner, 2018). Many of the native ones were born in a scenario of economic crisis that proved catastrophic for the sector, but led to the birth of 579 new outlets between 2008 and 2015 (Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid, 2015); most of them digital and launched by journalists as a form of self-employment.

These forms of entrepreneurial journalism brought with them "new business styles based on greater social responsibility and greater transparency, which involve the online publication of accounting reports distancing themselves from legacy news companies characterized by opacity" (Casero-Ripollés, 2016). In fact, projects born on the Internet often opt for a younger staff formed of tech-savvy digital natives who develop audience-centric models of journalism (Wu, 2017) and a more open attitude toward citizen participation than legacy organizations and practitioners (Domingo, 2015). Regardless of digital news media types, all MAIs can be classified according to the moment of the news production process they affect (Heikkilä et al., 2012): before production, during production, and after publication.

Before production, news organizations arrange a constellation of spaces in which they make public all kinds of corporate information that serves to improve their transparency as media actors. Some of them also make available to the public their ethical codes and style guides, initially conceived as documents for internal use, which acquire new possibilities of dissemination and update thanks to the Internet and a public projection superior to the obsolescent printed editions (Rojas Torrijos & Ramon-Vegas, 2017). Another formula timidly explored in the country is the spaces dedicated to economic transparency that treasure potential to verify editorial independence, an option that has gained strength after the irruption of the reader-funded business models present in the Spanish market since the beginning of the decade of the 2010s (García-Avilés & Arias Robles, 2016).

During production, digital news media offer different instruments to make their activity and ways of working visible, so as to increase transparency in their news production. Thus, it is common for each news story to have a whole series of indicators that reveal crucial aspects about the creators of the article (bylines/author's previous publications), its temporal validity (timestamps/updates) or its soundness (links to sources). Among the initiatives that demolish the fourth wall of their workspace, the newsroom blogs have been slowly adopted by the Spanish outlets due to the effort and time they require, not always properly recognized (García-Avilés, 2019). In the most radical approach, the opening of news production can be materialized in collaborative content, in which journalists proactively request user-generated content to nourish their pieces, something that in Spain has often been done without the guidance of clear strategies (Masip & Suau, 2014).

After publication, there are possibilities for dialogue with the public that demonstrate the organization's responsiveness. At this stage, established instruments from the offline world are renewed, such as letters to editors, which on the Internet are not restricted by paper space limitations (Pastor, 2011); or as the ombudsperson that manages reader complaints, still present in four prestigious Spanish newspapers (Alsius, Rodríguez-Martínez, & Mauri-Ríos, 2018). For their part, e-mail and web forms are the most basic private channels in which readers express their demands for professional responsibility, although on other occasions these interventions arise publicly, in spaces where a community emerges, and that in Spain began to originate in discussion forums and blog zones. Ultimately, online comments ended up prevailing as a standard of feedback that the academic literature describes as a potential instrument for holding news media responsible (Craft, Vos, & David Wolfgang, 2016; Heikkilä et al., 2012). However, in Western European countries like Spain they have been frequently harmed by their "sheer volume…, their spontaneity and unruliness" that has led to online news media dealing with poor quality comments, in which hate speech and violations of people's dignity "are not infrequent" (Heikkilä et al., 2012, p. 59).

Beyond the internally driven online MAIs offered on the websites, social media arise as the most prominent external digital spaces in which journalists and media brands can engage and take responsibility for their work before the 'crowd-criticism.' Journalists share this arena with an active audience that can overcome the limitations and indulgences of professionals as watchdogs of their own work: "We can assume that media users interested in the quality of journalism have no…incentives to remain in good terms with media professionals, and thus can fully exploit their sanctioning power" (Fengler, 2012, p. 186). In this sense, the Spanish journalists do not employ peer criticism to the same degree as their international colleagues (Rodríguez-Martínez, Mauri-Ríos, & Fedele, 2017), and they feel more responsible to their conscience, codes of ethics or their sources than to the audience (Chaparro-Domínguez, Suárez-Villegas, & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2019).

3. Research Questions and Methods

This work presents a qualitative research analysis of the online MAIs driven in internal and external digital spaces by a sample composed of the most visited general-interest digital news media in Spain, according to the weekly audience results in the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report Spain* (Negredo, 2019). Thus, our strategic selection included the online editions of two newspapers (*ElPais.com* and *ElMundo.es*) and two online-only outlets (*Eldiario.es* and *ElConfidencial.com*). This study seeks answers to the following questions:

RQ1: What kind of online MAIs are being implemented by these digital news outlets?

RQ2: What internal routines, protocols and perceptions determine the effectiveness of such instruments?

RQ3: Are there significant differences between the adoption of these instruments in digital native and legacy media?

To respond to RQ1, we compiled the digital instruments classified in previous research (Fengler et al., 2014; Suárez-Villegas et al., 2017), which were added to our analysis by a snowball sampling technique (Goodman, 1961) until reaching a total of 15 online MAIs present on the website of each outlet, articulated in the three phases described in our theoretical framework (Heikkilä et al., 2012). During alternate weeks of the first six months of 2018, we applied a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) using a code sheet focused on performance categories (frequency, function and visible results) for these mechanisms, which were classified according to their nature, using the distinctions previously established in the literature (Mauri-Ríos & Ramon-Vegas, 2015; Suárez-Villegas et al., 2017): self-regulation (S), transparency (T), and participatory monitoring (P). Finally, each instrument received a rating based on their level of implementation: consistently implemented (●, 1 pt.), irregularly implemented (○, 0.5 pt.) or not implemented at all (×, 0 pt.). The quantification of these variables allowed us to visualize the implementation of MAIs using Kiviat diagrams, two-dimensional charts where these metrics were represented with points on axes that start from the same central coordinate and that, connected to each other, draw useful areas for comparative purposes.

In order to address RQ2, we conducted telephone in-depth interviews with the journalists who lead the audience engagement teams in these digital news media and are in charge of a staff of 12 editors (Raquel Seco, *El País*), 5 (Santiago Saiz, *El Mundo*), 9 (Ander Oliden, *El Diario*), and 3 (Álvaro Rigal, *El Confidencial*). From a semi-structured and exploratory questionnaire, we asked open questions about the MAIs in which their opinions, perceptions or knowledge structures were requested. We organized the questions around thematic blocks according to our study premises and formulated them in an order that flowed from general, simple or descriptive questions to those more complex or sensitive that required evaluations (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado, & Baptista Lucio, 2010, p. 421). Those questions revolved around daily tasks ("Is the correction of errors reported by the audience properly carried out?"), customs ("Is there any limitation when linking to news sources?"), and viewpoints ("In your opinion, what is the general feeling of your organization towards the implementation of social media guidelines?").

To achieve the comparative results expected in RQ3, we contrasted the qualitative (and later quantified) results obtained from our content analysis by distinguishing them according to the nature of each outlet (legacy/native), in the same way that we brought the statements of their respective interviewees together. In order to outline the leading outlets for which these journalists work, a brief contextual description of each of them is given below. *ElPais.com* is the digital edition of the best-selling general-interest daily in Spain, which has been present on the Internet since 1996. In the next decade, this outlet assumed immediacy, multimedia and citizen participation, but also experimented unsuccessfully with a paywall. In 2010, it incorporated an internal social network, Eskup, and two years later, it became the world leader in Spanish-language news. After changing its slogan to "The Global Newspaper in Spanish," it tried to expand its reach with the launch of specific editions for America, Brazil, Catalonia and the English-speaking public. Its main competitor, *El Mundo*, launched its online edition in 1995 and developed a digital newsroom formed by a team of pioneers who left for *El País* in 2000. *ElMundo.es* underwent major redesigns linked to digital innovation and the improvement of its accessibility in 2009, 2015 and 2019. In 2010, the newspaper's parent group began distributing its contents on a digital newsstand called Orbyt, based on a freemium business strategy.

The most read native online news outlet in the country is *Eldiario.es*, founded in 2012 by a group of journalists who own more than 70% of the outlet and among which is its Editor-in-Chief, author of the well-known political blog *Escolar.net*. This outlet is characterized by prioritizing alternative informative approaches and sections, a rapid technological adaptation and a policy of alliances and acquisitions of other media brands, added to a wide network of regional branches throughout the country. Its business model is based on subscribers ('partners') as a complement to advertising. Finally, *ElConfidencial.com* is a veteran player that was born in 2001, in the midst of the dotcom crisis, as a digital native news site inspired by the old and influential newsletters. Initially focused on economic issues aimed at an exclusive audience, six years later it evolved into a project with a general-interest ambition with which it achieved sustained growth, supported by an innovation laboratory that experiments with ideas and formats such as data journalism or major investigations in collaboration with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

4. Online Media Accountability Practices

4.1. Before Production

We include here the online media accountability practices before production, which mean to consider not only those practices directly related to content production but reflected on the accountability of the organization, its structure, and its business practices. Publishing corporate information is a transparency instrument fully incorporated in the analyzed news media (see Table 1); all of them offer information about their owners through a static web page that can always be accessed from the bottom of the homepage, as is the case with the organigrams that, in the manner of mastheads, are widely used to present those who hold important positions within the staff. As for the detailed rosters of these outlets' sources of finance, they remain veiled with the excep-

Table 1. Level of implementation of MAIs that have an impact before news production.

MAI	*ElPais.com*	*ElMundo.es*	*Eldiario.es*	*ElConfidencial.com*
Corporate information (T)	●	●	●	●
Staff structure (T)	●	●	●	●
Sources of finance (T)	×	×	●	×
Mission statements (T)	●	●	●	×
Published codes of ethics (S) (T)	●	●	×	×

Notes: Participatory monitoring (P), self-regulation (S), transparency (T), consistently implemented (●, 1 pt.), irregularly implemented (○, 0.5 pt.) not implemented at all (×, 0 pt.).

tion of *El Diario*, whose Editor-in-Chief reports annually on the balance sheet of his outlet, consistent with a business model in which reader subscriptions meant 43.4% of the total revenues for 2018.

As part of the commitments made with The Trust Project consortium in 2018, the two print media, *El País* and *El Mundo*, make their mission statements and codes of ethics fully visible. According to the interviewees, this information has always been collected in the print edition of their style books, but so far it had hardly been accessible from the web. On the other hand, *El Confidencial* and *El Diario* mention in some of their articles the existence of deontological codes that govern their activity, but do not believe that it is necessary to make them available to the public. While *El Confidencial* remains opaque in terms of its values, *El Diario* opts for an original solution to unveil the set of principles that define its editorial line: a section called 'Focos' ('Focal points') that offers over twenty issue categories that, as tags, define the core and editorial priorities of the outlet.

4.2. During Production

The four outlets recognize the importance of showing the author's byline on each digital article, except for those that come from one or several news agencies and those that have their origin in press releases and official sources, which are usually signed using the name of the newspaper. Every article shows in a transparent way the timestamps of the latest updates and all the bylines are enriched with hypertext that offers the possibility of informing oneself further about the authors: the most frequent option is to link the bylines to the profiles of these journalists on Twitter and/or their history of previous publications. However, the profiles that explore the identity of journalists have only been developed in *El Diario*, where authors also have their own space that includes a small biographical outline and their past interventions in the comment boxes.

The use of hypertext to link to sources is frequent in the four outlets, both in the news body and in small pull quotes. Although the main purpose of hypertext is to link to related content within the outlet's site, the remarkable presence of links to original sources such as external websites or even documentary sources—such as judicial decrees or sentences—that occasionally are embedded in the articles to facilitate their consultation. With regard to offering precise links to sources, at *El País* "not only is there not a policy against it, but [its use] is encouraged", while at *El Mundo* there is, in general, "a healthy tradition of linking" even to the competition, although our interviewee perceives that, over time, fewer and fewer links are used. Furthermore, print outlets occasionally suffer a hypertextual impoverishment during the night, when the texts from the printed edition replace those that have been written for the website on the previous day and their original links are not restored, which undoubtedly weakens accountability. At the digital natives, there are no impediments to link to any type of external content, as *El Diario*'s interviewee corroborates: "On the contrary, if the editor in charge does not link, he will receive a warning to do so." In the same vein, the interviewee of *El Confidencial* emphasizes that it is an outlet made mostly by professionals who had a blog when they were young and conceive of that proceeding as something "natural," although there are always "people who are more prone to insert them and people who are less."

Only the native outlets keep active newsroom blogs. The *Blog de la Redacción* of *Eldiario.es* announces new projects, initiatives and events organized by this outlet. For its part, in *El Confidencial* this space, under the name 'En contacto' ('In contact'), usually brings together corporate information, audience records and other business achievements not always connected to accountability. In contrast, at the legacy outlets they recognize that transparency initiatives aimed at showing the interiors of journalistic work emerge without planning or being fit into specific spaces, i.e., spontaneously, and when favorable informative situations arise. For example, *El Mundo* published a video of the editorial meeting in which the publication of the photo of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian child drowned on the Turkish coast in 2015 during the migration crisis in Europe, was discussed.

As seen in Table 2, the sections in which these outlets propose pieces that involve readers in collaborative contents are unusual and consulted journalists confirm that they emerge more as specific initiatives than as regular spaces for professional-citizen collaboration. Except for the op-eds and collaborative interviews (or 'ask the expert' features) in their different formats and platforms, which enjoy a certain vitality, these participatory pieces

Table 2. Level of implementation of MAIs that have an impact during news production.

MAI	*ElPais.com*	*ElMundo.es*	*Eldiario.es*	*ElConfidencial.com*
Authorship (byline)/profiles (T)	●	●	●	●
Timestamps/updates (T)	●	●	●	●
Links to sources (T)	●	●	●	●
Newsroom blogs (T)	×	×	●	●
Collaborative contents (P)	○	○	○	○

Notes: Participatory monitoring (P), transparency (T), consistently implemented (●, 1 pt.), irregularly implemented (○, 0.5 pt.) not implemented at all (×, 0 pt.).

are characterized as secondary or as a support for other articles driven by these news media. The interviewees asseverate that little user-generated content is proactively requested and, when it is produced, usually revolves around soft news or is motivated by the stress of crisis news coverage—terrorist attacks, natural disasters, etc. The enormous effort involved in managing, filtering and editing readers' collaborations is the main factor that slows their implementation.

4.3. After Publication

Regarding contact opportunities, the interviewees agree to giving great importance to the possibility that the audience can contact journalists through the traditional methods established on the website (web forms and e-mail) and they consider that these readers are more loyal and have taken more effort to contact than those who do it through social media. While *El País* provides the generic e-mail addresses of each of the sections, *El Mundo* prefers to centralize the contact through a single e-mail address/form, which requires of them a great management effort: "It is necessary to filter. Of every one hundred mails you get…you find a 'gold nugget."' In the natives, the author contact opportunities are more specific: each editor of *El Confidencial* can be contacted individually through a simple web form and *El Diario* journalists show their e-mail address on their profiles. Often these professionals receive congratulations from readers through the above channels, which strengthens their self-esteem: "Suddenly, feeling that you have written something that someone has liked or has been useful…reminds you who you are writing for and that there are people there," declares the audience manager of *El País*.

Of the four analyzed outlets, only the native *El Diario* offers a correction button to its readers (see Table 3), called 'He visto un error' ('I have seen an error'). Even so, all respondents state that the reception of corrections detected by the audience is constant, of a heterogeneous nature and notified through a wide variety of means, as is explained at *El Mundo*: "People read the website in many ways and [corrections] can arrive in a thousand ways," so audience engagement teams remain alert to comments, e-mails and social media to correct any errors. As the interviewees confirm, all problems localized are amended, especially errata and factual inaccuracies. Nevertheless, when the corrections suggested by readers collide with editorial decisions, such as those related to informative approaches or priorities, rectifications take hold less. Most of the studied outlets even attach a corrigendum to the piece, which reports that it has been updated once rectified.

Only *El País* has an ombudsman that addresses complaints about the journalistic norms and values of the newspaper and delves into the mistakes, now in an innovative Q&A format. In the opinion of the head of audience engagement, his figure "has a lot of value" thanks to his "total autonomy to evaluate, analyze and criticize the work of the newspaper," since he receives from the Editor-in-Chief "the power to dissent, to be able to do self-criticism." In the past, *El Diario* had a 'community ombudsperson,' now inactive: "We are not the kind of news outlet that needs to have a permanent ombudsperson present in the newsroom." It just so happened that this instrument was overlapped by the variety of accountability poles offered by the outlet and, in addition, the professionals who held the position were involved in other projects, which contributed to the initial enthusiasm gradually diminishing.

Table 3. Level of implementation of MAIs that have an impact after publication.

MAI	*ElPais.com*	*ElMundo.es*	*Eldiario.es*	*ElConfidencial.com*
Contact opportunities (P)	●	●	●	●
Correction buttons (P)	×	×	●	×
Ombudsperson (S) (T) (P)	●	×	×	×
Comments (P)	●	●	●	●
Letters to editors (P)	●	×	●	×

Notes: Participatory monitoring (P), self-regulation (S), transparency (T), consistently implemented (●, 1 pt.), irregularly implemented (○, 0.5 pt.) not implemented at all (×, 0 pt.).

With regard to comments as MAIs, they are weakened at the individual level by the unequal penetration of the habit of reading the readers' comments at the analyzed outlets. It is a spontaneous practice that depends exclusively on the will of the journalists and is often displaced by other more pressing tasks for them: "If they stop doing it to get a scoop, it's understandable," adds *El Mundo*'s manager. As interesting as it may be, inviting them to interact may not be enough and forcing them to do so is not an option either. Therefore, it is more complicated to get journalists to write and take part in the debate in the comment boxes, despite the fact that this routine has sometimes been promoted from management positions. At *El Confidencial* "many editors are not very supportive of reading the comments on their pieces, but the audience engagement team does read them." At *Eldiario.es*, on the contrary, they defend the fact that "comments are read…they are read a lot," although "not so much is replied."

Our interviewees point out that the climate of debate on the comments varies considerably according to the section to which the news content in question belongs. The most optimistic perspectives on the value of this instrument come from legacy outlets, such as *El Mundo*, where readers are perceived to make interesting contributions, especially in the sections related to qualified issues (such as Business). There, the readers who participate "know the subject and, sometimes, they are the ones who criticize you…based on judgments and reasons," instead of using, for example, an intern as a scapegoat. In contrast, at *El Confidencial* it is stated that "comments are dying because young people do not leave them" on the website, but on public or private social network platforms. Likewise, it is acknowledged that the majority of comments are written by readers of an age range over 40 years, so it is considered a mechanism that is winding down: "I have not left a comment in my entire life, although I do comment on the news everyday," says this audience manager in his early 30s.

The challenge of moderating readers' comments and achieving a favorable environment for participatory monitoring to be harmonious and effective is assumed from different perspectives and strategies based on postmoderation and on applying participation policies that have been adapted to create the appropriate atmosphere. The two studied print outlets have an important influx of comments, so they use external moderation companies that usually work with word filters to separate the uncivil comments from valuable contributions. Thus, their audience engagement teams are only responsible for decisions of a last resort, such as the application of warnings, sanctions or expulsions of unruly users or the recognition of the most reliable ones—marked as 'outstanding user' at *El País* or as 'partner' at *El Diario*. Conversely, native outlets, which receive a lower flow of comments, keep this management internalized and entrust much of the daily work to the voting and reporting systems that are available to users. In any case, we have detected a certain tendency on the part of the interviewees to value comments with restrained optimism, and almost always compared them to what they perceive to exist in the competition: "bearable," "tolerable" and even that "it may be worth it" are some of the ways in which they refer to this instrument.

Letters to editors are a feedback instrument as accepted as they are questioned. *El País* defends them as an identity sign, so it not only publishes these missives online, but encourages readers to send them via e-mail. Meanwhile, *El Mundo* values these texts and keeps them active in their printed edition, but has stopped publishing them in its free-access online version. In its almost two decades of online history, *El Confidencial* has never used letters to editors as a way to spiritually distance themselves from the old print media. In comparison, *El Diario* has tried to rejuvenate this instrument through a blog, '*El Diario* responde' ('*El Diario* responds'), that, in addition to making readers dissatisfactions visible, incorporates some characteristic features of transparency and pedagogy of the ombudsperson. There is the opportunity to ask "essentially for questions about the internal functioning of the newspaper" that the Editor-in-Chief and other relevant staff members respond to, offering explanations or endorsing their way of proceeding regarding newsmaking.

Although the presence on social media of news professionals and organizations contributes in ways that should not be underestimated before and during production, it is undoubtedly after publication when readers' activities are more used for accountability purposes: "They help us a lot with self-criticism….They encourage us to set the standards much higher and to look at ourselves less complacently," says the interviewee from *El País*. In general, monitoring reactions on social media is mentioned as an interaction more supported by journalists than reading the comments on the website, even in spite of the occasional harassment that some of them suffer. Regarding their perceptions of social media criticism, they characterize Twitter users as the most demanding and scrupulous, but also those who know the news brands they follow best. At the time, they conceive Facebook users as a collective less interested in quality news, but who come to make contact through this platform even more than by e-mail, as is the case at *El País*.

The strategies for the management of organizational profiles on social media focus on content dissemination due to the commercial obligations that push them to get web traffic, which are imperative and put ahead of more participatory contents that would improve community bonds. The audience engagement teams of the legacy news media, the largest ones, experience difficulties in getting a common publishing style to be respected in the extensive catalog of organizational profiles they support and whose management is partly delegated. Native outlets, on the other hand, tend to centralize the management of their social media profiles on the audience engagement teams themselves.

Although none of the analyzed outlets has issued social media guidelines, the audience managers at the legacy outlets are the most open to regulate journalists' behavior, especially if these regulations are agreed on by the staff and are not imposed from above. At *El País* (565 individual profiles registered on Twitter) and *El Mundo* (326), the interviewees recognize the existence of concerns derived from the editors' presence on social media in the past, and it is pointed out that the generational differences, more pronounced in their staffs, are a significant aspect to understand this issue. On the other hand, at *El Diario* (164) and *El Confidencial* (141) they do not consider adopting any regulation: behavior of their professionals emerges in an organic way "guided by common sense," something that has avoided important incidents in the past.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings show that the online MAIs implemented in the leading digital news media in Spain maintain a propensity for transparency; and while the analyzed legacy outlets preserve better the essences of self-regulation, both types of media maintain a similar commitment to participatory instruments, as seen in Figure 1 and Table 4. The two outlets that have the largest audience engagement teams lead the implementation of MAIs that have an impact on news production, led by the native *Eldiario.es* and followed closely by the digital edition of the newspaper *El País* (see Figure 2 and Table 5). The scarcity of instruments used by *ElConfidencial.com* in the first and last phases or by *ElMundo.es* in the final stage suggest that, in effect, media accountability should not be observed as "a matter of a caricatural opposition of fossilized media brands versus agile and creative media startups" (Filloux, 2014), but rather it depends on structural factors of a diverse nature—cultural, technological, economic and even sociodemographic—that we have identified and condition the performance of MAIs.

We have found that the two legacy news media have articulated a greater number of instruments to make their transparency as media actors effective before production (see Figure 3 and Table 6), especially when making public the codes of ethics that guide their activity. At the same time, revealing the sources of finance is an unusual transparency commitment that only *Eldiario.es* assumes, in coherence with the important financing it receives directly from its readers. Substantial differences have been detected in the ways of understanding production transparency, as the digital natives have systematized and normalized it more than the legacy outlets, mainly through newsroom blogs that are not free from shortcomings, given that the commercial and promotional aspects coexist and sometimes take up more space than genuine revelations about editorial processes, a characteristic that has been also highlighted in contem-

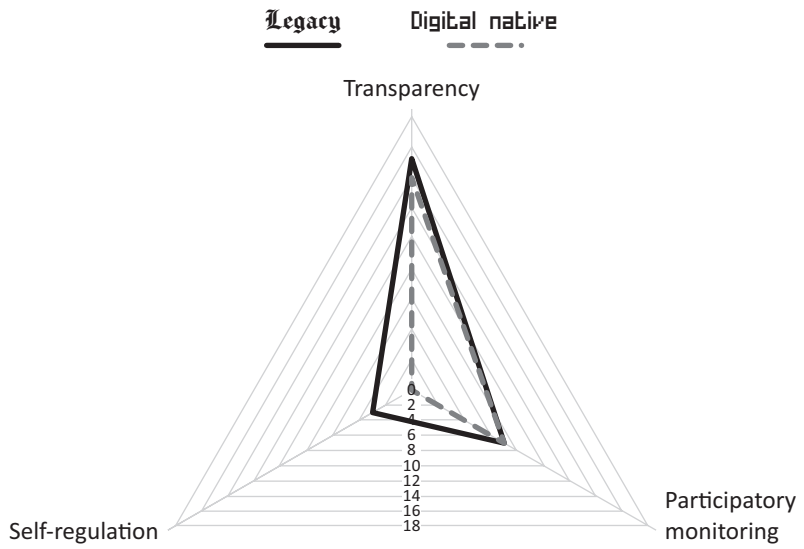

Figure 1. Kiviat diagram representing the scores obtained by each type of media according to the nature of their implemented MAIs. Source: Authors.

Table 4. Scores obtained by each type of media according to the nature of their implemented MAIs.

Nature of implemented MAIs	Legacy outlets	Digital native outlets
Self-regulation (S)	3	0
Transparency (T)	15	14
Participatory monitoring (P)	7	7

Notes: Participatory monitoring (P), self-regulation (S), transparency (T).

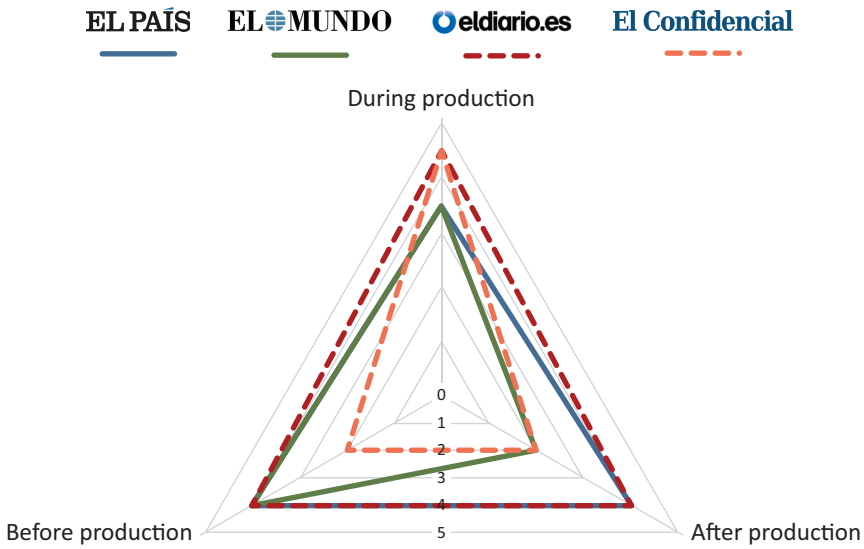

Figure 2. Kiviat diagram representing the scores obtained by each media outlet according to their implemented MAIs in the three phases of news production. Source: Authors.

Table 5. Scores obtained by each media outlet according to their implemented MAIs in the three phases of news production.

News production phase involved	*ElPais.com*	*ElMundo.es*	*Eldiario.es*	*ElConfidencial.com*
Before production	4	4	4	2
During production	3,5	3,5	4	4
After publication	4	2	4	2

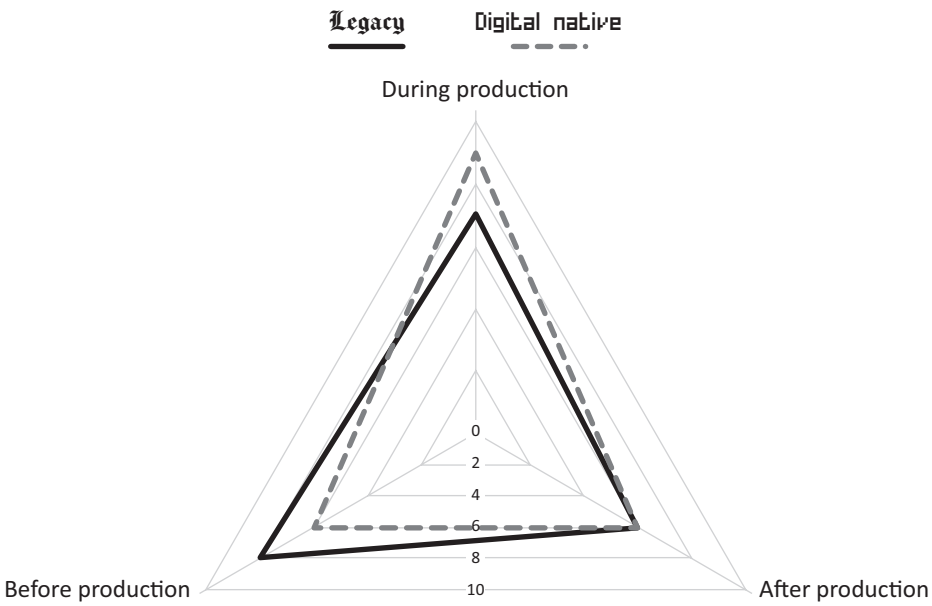

Figure 3. Kiviat diagram representing the scores obtained by each type of media according to their implemented MAIs in the three phases of news production. Source: Authors.

Table 6. Scores obtained by each type of media according to their implemented MAIs in the three phases of news production.

News production phase involved	Legacy outlets	Digital native outlets
Before production	8	6
During production	7	9
After publication	6	6

poraneous works (García-Avilés, 2019). Although the culture of linking to sources is widespread, in the online editions of newspapers it can be conditioned by technical determinants derived from the two publishing cycles with which they work.

Likewise, regardless of the nature of the outlet and the size of the staff, conversations with audience managers delineate an outlook in which the high labor demands of journalists make it difficult to undertake collaborative initiatives that generate truly valuable user-generated content for a more open and higher quality news discourse. For this same reason, although the audience teams of all outlets remain attentive after publication, it is common that attention to feedback has a low priority among the elementary work routines of the majority of journalists. Skepticism toward comments as MAIs contributes to this, although the smaller communities of the digital natives enjoy a more thorough management than the legacy media communities, necessarily managed with external support.

The protection of journalistic authority determines which errors pointed out by readers are corrected: the factual and formal ones are frequently rectified but journalists are reluctant to accept external interferences in their editorial decisions, something that can be conceived as a way to legitimize their role and protect their autonomy (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Eide, 2017). Even so, there is certain organizational interest for accountability to occur within the media domain and not in external spaces where journalists do not have control over the information flows, which is distinctive from their occupational ideology (Lewis, 2012). According to the journalistic field theory, that understands the profession as an evolving social construction (Carlson, 2018), these findings present journalists as agents that try to preserve journalistic boundaries. In the opposite direction, it is openly recognized that professionals monitor and are more responsive on social media than on the outlet's website, something that contrasts with the short-termist organizational strategy on those platforms, characterized by a diffusion logic and a focus on web traffic generation over any attempt to consolidate bonds with the audience. Consequently, the adoption of social media guidelines is not a priority concern in these newsrooms, especially in the digital native outlets that employ younger journalists accustomed to working in digital environments.

To sum up, we have verified that the most essential instruments of transparency seem to be established in the leading Spanish digital news media, although the traditional self-regulation instruments, less implemented, have possibilities of revitalization thanks to the inclusion of innovative features. Consolidating strategies to achieve a participatory monitoring that benefits the integrity of these outlets is a great challenge for which it is necessary to continue working on improving the functioning of the internal communities of readers without neglecting that of the external ones. For this, it will still be relevant to bet on teams specialized in audience engagement, provided with sufficient resources to properly manage citizen inputs and willing to motivate staff by highlighting the importance of public accountability initiatives.

As a contribution, this study has showed that media accountability is more a cultural, structural, and unique question to the organization than we might have assumed in the past. According to our results, media system comes out as a key factor to better understand this process. However, as a limitation of the study we should address that results are based on the Spanish news media landscape, that is considered a polarized pluralistic model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Future studies should extend their research on accountability and replicate it among other countries, with a different media and political system, in order to test in what extent media and political system can be a crucial factor among other cultural contexts. In addition, this study could be enriched with future analyses that take into account the business nature of the news organization, in order to verify whether its structure, funding model or proprietorship affect the results. Further extension of this descriptive study, from methodological aspects, could be considered in future research by adding a joint interpretation of content analysis data and journalists interviews in a complementary manner. Similarly, a survey of readers' opinions about their interest in participating to hold these outlets responsible could be relevant to weigh their role in accountability processes.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Managing Social Networks in Online-Native Newsrooms: When Less Means More

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Abstract
During the last few years online-only media have been explored as an alternative to mainstream media. The development of this new media model coincides in time with an increase in dependence on social networks. Online media editors estimate that one third of their visits proceed from Facebook, a figure that obliges them to create specific strategies to ensure their company's reputation and growth in the 2.0 field. The aim of this article is to assess what motivates Spanish digital-native newspapers to act on social networks, analyse their internal view of these channels, and describe their strategies for managing their relationship with audiences. Based on a qualitative and longitudinal approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with the social media editors of the most relevant digital-native newspapers in Spain—*El Confidencial*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Español* and *El HuffPost*—during 2017 and 2019, in order to trace the evolution of their professional routines. These social media editors consider that although digital-native newsrooms are smaller than traditional ones, they are more agile in reacting to metrics. Our results also confirm that Instagram is generating great expectations, and the new paywall system is affecting the way audiences are understood.

Keywords
audience; media business; new media; newspaper; online-native newsroom; social media; social networks

Issue
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1. Introduction

For several years *The Huffington Post* and *BuzzFeed* have headed the world ranking of media that generate the most user engagement (Poell & Van Dijck, 2014) and have been classified as the 'most social' publishers on the web. In 2013, *Buzzfeed* produced 7,500 posts a month for Facebook and generated nearly 16 million interactions in the form of likes, comments and shares ("Who are the most social," 2013). According to Storyclash, in June 2017 *Huffington Post US*'s interactions had risen to 28.7 million, and in *BuzzFeed*'s case to 25.4 million. In Europe the year 2013 saw the appearance of *De Correspondent*, following a crowdfunding campaign that in only eight days managed to collect €1 million (Harbers, 2016). These publications form part of a new typology of mass medium, the digital-native media—new actors that coexist with legacy media and technological platforms, configuring a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013). This new scenario combines "the best practices of traditional journalism—fairness, accuracy, storytelling, deep investigations—with the best tools available to the digital world—speed, transparency, and, above all, engagement" (Huffington, 2013).

Their spread has coincided with the crisis and weakness of the conventional media system. Thus, while the staff at traditional newsrooms was cut by 25% between 2008 and 2018 in the US, in that same period employment in digital-native newsrooms almost doubled, rising from 7,400 to 13,500 (Geiger, 2019). In Spain the

map of digital-native media rose from representing 9.1% of all digital media in 2005 to 35.1% in 2018. In that year 3,065 active digital media were identified, of which 1,077 were digital-natives (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa, & Breiner, 2018). These figures have resulted in the development of digital-native media acquiring positive connotations, and to their being explored as an alternative to mainstream media. This has been a cause of optimism for the profession and the new generations of journalists, as they see new opportunities for growth and professional survival in the activities of these online-native media.

In general, digital-born news media are smaller than legacy media in terms of their reach, resources, and revenues, while at the same time they have smaller newsrooms, leaner organizations, and lower distribution costs (Nicholls, Shabbir, & Nielsen, 2016). This smaller volume together with their innate digital mentality has speeded up the implantation of editorial innovation, experimentation with forms, specialization of content and the use of alternative sources, all of which has favoured the heterogeneity of existing models. Another characteristic of the most relevant digital-native newspapers is that their emergence is usually associated with values. They affirm their commitment to creating a different, freer and better-informed society by means of a regenerated journalism (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016) that is independent, rigorous and responsible, and publishes exclusive, striking and high-quality investigations, all of which connects them to publics disappointed with conventional media. Moreover, their routines are committed to the practice of accountable journalism, recognized by numerous awards, such as the five Pulitzer Prizes won by Propublica. In Spain, exclusive investigations by *El Confidencial* and *Eldiario.es* resulted in the resignation of two ministers from the new government (Negredo, Vara, Amoedo, & Moreno, 2019).

Proximity to their audiences is another of their distinctive features, which is why from the start they have placed their trust in social media, as mentioned above. In this sense, their participation on social media has awoken a similar optimism, not only because of the traffic they obtain, but because, treated appropriately, users are transformed into subscribers (Southern, 2019). The key, as some reports note, resides in quality rather than clicks (Nicholls, Shabbir, Graves, & Nielsen, 2018).

The main consequence of this intermediation, according to the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2019*, is that only 29% of the audience prefers to access news via the web or publishers' applications, although percentages differ greatly between countries. In the specific case of Spain, the figure falls to 20%, while 53% choose social media as sources of news (Nicholls, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). This context, combined with the broad census of online-native media that emerges from previous studies and their capacity for innovation (García-Aviles, Carvajal-Prieto, de Lara-González, & Arias-Robles, 2018), justify an exploratory analysis that addresses how these companies manage social media. The novelty of this article lies in its analysis of how social media management has evolved at four digital native media over two years. It provides the inside view of social media editors on adapting to the challenges of a permanently changing environment influenced by complexity and uncertainty theories (Wilczek, 2019).

1.1. The Context of the Spanish Media System

The present structure of the media groups in Spain began to take shape after the arrival of democracy 40 years ago. With the disappearance of the dictatorship and on the basis of the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution of 1978, new newspapers emerged, the ownership of others changed hands, and publishing groups began to develop that would finally become multimedia groups. In the Spanish mass media sector there is a predominance of companies that publish printed newspapers, the majority with a regional or provincial character, and there are no yellow newspapers or evening editions (Salaverría, Díaz-Noci, López, & Palomo, 2005). More recently, the peculiarities of the Spanish media system, with its high concentration of companies and vigorous online press, together with the country's political instability during the last years have favoured the spread and consolidation of the most relevant digital-native newspapers, especially following the fall in sales of the printed media. In this sense, the circulation of the ten main newspapers decreased by 92,000 copies in 2018 (Negredo et al., 2019). With respect to media consumption in Spain, television is the medium most used for obtaining news (91%), while social media are the second option with 77%, figures that are above the European average (Palacio, 2018, p. 68).

2. Literature Review

From the perspective of the academy, most scientific production related to digital-born media has focused on comparing their practice with that of legacy media. The search for recognition and legitimacy in the sector has given rise to a combination of conservative and transformative strategies (Stringer, 2018). Thus, after analysing *BuzzFeed*'s reporting during the 2015 and 2017 UK general election campaigns, Thomas and Cushion (2019) concluded that the coverage provided by this popular digital-native media platform had evolved and was approaching the logic of institutional news media. Nonetheless, Painter, Kristiansen, and Schäfer (2018) did observe differences in the news coverage related to climate change, where more selective approaches were applied to attract new audience segments. Different news consumption patterns between legacy and digital-native news brands have also been observed (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016).

Case studies of different countries have made it possible to recognize diverse funding models, distribution strategies and editorial priorities, and to draw up a ba-

sic typology of digital-born media: domestic for-profit players, whose reach, resources, and digital revenues are similar to those of the legacy news media, thus making them possible competitors; domestic non-profit players, which depend on donations and complement the legacy media; and international for-profit players, which prioritize global expansion via the system of 'growth-first-revenues-later' (Nicholls et al., 2016, p. 36).

The development of this new media model coincides in time with an increase in the dependence on social networks. The prominence achieved by content proceeding from these spaces has given rise to a wide conceptual debate on what constitutes news (Canter, 2018), and has also been the axis of some investigations that have detected how the extensive use of social networks by digital-native media has not only influenced the shape of agenda setting (Bane, 2019), but also the creation of a different kind of reporting, employing a youthful tone, and covering taboo topics (Nicholls et al., 2016, p. 32). In this respect, the use made of Twitter during electoral periods has also been analysed, with the conclusion that the levels of production and engagement of legacy media are still far higher (Majó, Zhao, Nurse, & Nielsen, 2017).

This article is related to others that focus on journalists' perceptions of the changes in professional routines and newsroom culture (Ryfe, 2009; Zeller & Hermida, 2015). In general, the culture of professionalism in the newsroom is resilient and resistant to change. Nevertheless, the activity journalists develop on social media tends to be more technology driven, brand inspired, entrepreneurial and interactive (Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Villi, 2014). This proximity influences the newsroom strategies employed, since earlier studies show that subjective writing style or polar sentiments expressed in the title of an article are positively associated with number of shares (Khuntia, Sun, & Yim, 2016). Some social media editors accentuate emotional and surprising story elements in posts, while also accepting the logic of algorithms to obtain social impact (Lischka, 2018). This constant and initially disruptive adaptation of routines has been normalized, in spite of entailing a dislocation of news and a loss of power (Broersma & Eldridge, 2019).

In spite of the close relation that digital-native media has maintained with social media since their emergence, there are no studies on how their journalists perceive their activities on social media, how they evaluate engagement generated beyond the website, what their limits are and the point to which they are willing to cede editorial control as they depend on non-proprietary platforms (Westlund & Ekström, 2018). To gain a better understanding of how this intermediation is being managed and the relevance of this activity for the medium, our main research questions are:

RQ1: What differences do social media managers perceive between social media activity in legacy media and digital-native media?

RQ2: What are the motives of digital-native media for acting on social media?

RQ3: How have their strategies evolved over time?

3. Methods

The methodology applied in this research to explore how digital-native media manage social media and to analyse their routines has a qualitative character (Patton, 2014). In-depth interviews provide a more complete and, in general, a more critical perspective for understanding the decisions taken by the media that affect their routines, as well as the causes that motivate them. A total of nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with social media managers from four of the most relevant digital-native media in Spain. The same number of interviews was applied by Zeller and Hermida (2015) to obtain the personal opinions and attitudes of senior online news managers and leading online journalists in Canada. Attention was paid to their different characteristics to ensure that different models would be represented and to develop a comparative perspective. We will now justify the selected case studies. *El Confidencial*, which had been active for 18 years in 2019, is the digital-native medium with the largest audience in Spain—it has 16.5 million unique users according to Comscore. It has the most staff, 155 workers, and an advertising turnover that reached €18 million in 2018. *El Español*, which emerged in 2015, has a similar sized audience and was the first digital newspaper launched in Spain thanks to crowdfunding. A total of 5,624 investors contributed €3,606,000 in a campaign that lasted for one and a half months and broke the world record in the journalistic sector (Del Arco, Yunquera, & Pérez, 2016). *El HuffPost* is an international player, founded in 2005 in the US with the name *The Huffington Post*. It operates in different languages and countries, mainly drawing on blogs and viral content. Its Spanish edition was launched in 2012 in co-ownership with Prisa (50%), the multimedia group that owns *El País*. These distinctive characteristics, together with a small newsroom made up of 22 people, justify its selection for inclusion in this investigation. The year 2012 also saw the emergence of *Eldiario.es*, which defends independent journalism and whose success is based on a mixed model of financing. Currently, 34,000 subscribers contribute 33% of its revenues.

Various earlier investigations approached digital-born media by applying the case study method to understand the activity developed by peripheral actors in journalism (Hermida & Young, 2019) or the evolution of the role of some digital native companies that began as online content aggregators or distributing viral content, to then move closer to hard news content (Wu, 2016). Recently, Vos and Thomas (2018) noted the absence of longitudinal studies that analyse changes beyond a single event or isolated organization. The importance of this research resides in the fact of its being a longitudi-

Table 1. List of interviewees.

Organization	Name and position	Year of interview
El Confidencial	Jose Manuel Rodriguez, social media editor	2017
	Eva Moreno, social media manager	2019
Eldiario.es	Ander Oliden, frontpage and social media manager	2017–2019
El Español	Angela Bonachera, social media editor	2017
	Patricia Morales, social media manager	2017
	Ana Delgado, social media manager & video manager	2019
El HuffPost	Guillermo Rodríguez, editor	2017–2019

nal study that considers how social media management has evolved at four media over two years. This approach is justified by the instability of this activity, which becomes apparent when the journalists interviewed are observed (Table 1), since two years on from the first interview only two remained at the medium to which they were affiliated. Diachronic studies applied to journalism that include industry insights provided by interviews with reporters make it possible for tendencies to be analysed (Knowles, Phillips, & Lidberg, 2017); such studies have also been applied in a specific form to web-based communication and social media (Williamson & Parolin, 2013). Concretely, this investigation was inspired by Chua and Westlund (2019); their case study method, involving two rounds of semi-structured, in-depth interviews over two and a half years, was also applied.

The first round of interviews was conducted in early 2017, in person and in the newsrooms of the newspapers. Several pre-tests were conducted, and the results were discussed with the group coders and the project leader. In 2019, the instrument was updated with the incorporation of new challenges that had emerged into the questionnaire and the interviews were conducted between August and October that year by telephone, a combination that had also been successfully implemented in previous studies (Sehl, Cornia, Graves, & Nielsen, 2019). The Likert scale questionnaire was added in the final round to evaluate how the relevance accorded to social media at the medium had evolved: 5 indicated that the social media department worked in a radically different way; 4 that there had been slight improvements; 3 stability; 2 that the department had reduced its tasks; and 1 that the department had lost prominence and even personnel. In total, 500 minutes of data were recorded. All the interviews together with the notes were uploaded to the Atlas.ti application in order to categorize the content and enrich the qualitative results.

4. Results

4.1. Their Priority: Activity on Social Media

The search for social impact is usually inherent in the history of online-native media (Nicholls et al., 2016, p. 33). When Pedro J. Ramirez announced the launch of the new online newspaper he would be editing, *El Español*, it already had social networks inscribed in its DNA, as he announced that its characteristics included being universal, independent, combative, plural, innovative, balanced, intelligent, and Twitter-enthusiastic (Del Arco et al., 2016). In fact, prior to its launch, the medium's Facebook account already had 20,500 followers, with 114,000 on Twitter.

For the social media managers of the Spanish online-native media analysed, these data demonstrate an unprecedented degree of social support, and in comparison with traditional media they consider their newsrooms to be more aware and better prepared to face the challenges of social media. They are also more agile when it comes to reacting to metrics, because their task does not end with the publication of their work online; 'direct selling' of their news items to the audience is also necessary. To achieve this goal they have the necessary skill and a positive attitude towards participatory environments is more widespread; although their staffs are smaller than those of the most relevant traditional media, they are more open to social experimentation. Thus, at *El Español* they have achieved a situation where the news writers are their own community managers. The managers at *Eldiario.es* and *El HuffPost* express themselves in similar terms, as their staffs are experts at working on social media and from the start both media have included relevant tweeters and bloggers amongst their collaborators. This reorientation of routines coincides with the alteration of news choreography; at *Eldiario.es* they confirm that their priority is to transmit a news item to a social network—even before elaborating the front page of the online publication—since it is the user's first window.

Further data confirms this commitment to, and success on, social media. Although the most relevant traditional media, like *El País* or *El Mundo*, have built up a bigger community on social media, none of their managers is active in these environments. A practice that runs contrary to the social reputation achieved by the editors of online-native media, like Pedro J. Ramirez at *El Español*, who, with 533,300 followers on Twitter, exceeds the number of followers of the main account of the medium he edits; or Ignacio Escolar, whose 966,200 followers approaches the figure reached by *Eldiario.es*. The latter has used the hashtag #EscolarResponde to

strengthen the connection with his audience and attend to questions from social network users.

Guillermo Rodríguez, editor of *El HuffPost*, admits that this dependence on social media also gives rise to more errors. These result from a spontaneity that makes online-native media more closely resemble the radio than the traditional press:

> The difference between online-native media and the traditional press is vast in every respect. Proximity to current affairs and the constant need to be publishing what is happening at the moment… An online medium is much more similar to a radio than to a newspaper because we live off breaking news, analysis in the heat of the moment. (Guillermo Rodríguez, personal communication)

This proximity to the audio-visual sector has enabled *El Español* and *El Confidencial* to integrate the video department in the social media department.

The proximity to their audiences of these media and their need to distinguish themselves from the news offer of the legacy media has also boosted the introduction of new sections where subscribers can publish articles, and private communication channels for sending in confidential tips, data and documents in a secure and anonymous way. *Filtra.la*, the portal for citizen complaints that forms part of the Associated Whistleblowing Press, is the platform used by *Eldiario.es*, while *El Confidencial* provides a secure mailbox powered by GlobaLeaks, and also relies on the encryption provided by WhatsApp and Signal.

But why do online-native media consider social media to be a priority? In 2017 their reasons included obtaining audience for the website, increasing traffic to increase publicity revenues, and spreading the brand image. For a medium that only operates online, a large part of its growth, the projection of its values and its social impact, all depend on social media. As José Manuel Rodríguez observes:

> *El Confidencial* is active on social media basically so that those who are unaware of its existence can get to know about it. Moreover, social media serve to capture readers because there are four essential steps in the strategy for audience development: attraction, retention, fostering loyalty and politicization. On social media we take care of attraction, that is, managing to attract people to the *El Confidencial* brand. (José Manuel Rodríguez, personal communication)

Guillermo Rodríguez's statements also reflected an obsession with traffic in 2017:

> We have to increase our number of followers on all social media, to test all of them at the same time; and if we see that it isn't working, to forget about them without any problem. Above all, our strategy consists in paying a lot of attention to Facebook: it's God. (Guillermo Rodríguez, personal communication)

In 2017 the editor of *El HuffPost* declared that social media were the main entrance portal to the website for readers—50% of total traffic—while at present this doesn´t exceed 28%. In 2019 direct circulation and rebound proceeding from *El País* accounted for 55% of the total, which is why they are promoting the brand more, which means paying greater attention to messages on Twitter and Instagram.

El Español also wanted to obtain greater visibility in 2017, and to achieve this they were not averse to tweeting content from other media. They were already publishing comic strips on Instagram, photos from their best reportages and were building stories. They now seek to establish a more personalized connection with the reader, giving priority to quality over quantity.

This motive has also run up against the negative side of participation (Quandt, 2018). In 2017 *Eldiario.es* was already warning about the exhaustion of some journalists, who had noticed a transformation of the environment and were constantly having to deal with messages that were more aggressive and insistent.

4.2. Evolution of Strategies

The longitudinal study of the tasks and strategies developed by social media managers at online-native media in 2017 and 2019 made it possible to detect that intuition took precedence over planning, and that there had been significant changes in their routines. These basically materialized in three aspects: 1) increasing their presence on social media, extensively and intensively; 2) capturing new subscribers; 3) and creating internal protocols to protect themselves against disinformation. On a Likert scale, all the interviewees rated this transformation above 4, cataloguing it as intense, and even radical, as they told us at *El Español*.

4.2.1. From Facebook to Instagram

From the organizational point of view, what stands out is the polyvalence of the members of the newsrooms studied. At *El HuffPost* seventeen journalists work on social media; four people are exclusively dedicated to Facebook and two to Instagram. Their editor believes that part of their success is due to the fact that there is neither unity of criteria nor a single discourse; each journalist applies their own style. At *Eldiario.es* two people are exclusively dedicated to social media, one more than two years ago. The seven section managers also contribute to the medium's activity on social media, although they must combine this with updating the portal and breaking news. *El Español* and *El Confidencial* both assign three people per day to managing social media.

Twitter and Facebook are the two social media that receive the most attention from the media analysed,

since they provide between 14% and 30% of their global traffic, figures that have fallen in comparison with 2017. At that time Facebook Live was a novelty and live transmissions became one of the goals of the participation managers consulted, in order to increase their audience and seek new business options. At present Zuckerberg's company continues to provide 80% of the readers proceeding from social media. However, their interest has shifted to Instagram, which is giving rise to greater expectations and is the big challenge for the future.

Instagram traffic to the media websites is still very limited, but it allows them to experiment, approach a younger market niche and increase their reach. The editor of *El HuffPost*, Guillermo Rodríguez, envisaged reaching 100,000 followers by the end of 2019—in 2017 they had 2,000—and he is certain of its economic benefits:

> Instagram is not only a good platform for younger users to get to know you, but also nowadays it is the platform with the biggest and best advertising outlet for sponsored content and stories. It is what advertisers are increasingly demanding. They want their advertising and their branded content to appear on Instagram channels. (Guillermo Rodríguez, personal communication)

Determining which is the fourth most relevant network does not produce such a homogeneous reply. For *Eldiario.es* it is Telegram. Since 2015 it has used this mobile instant messaging application, and it is currently the Spanish medium with the highest number of subscribers, 25,836. Linkedin is the fourth most important network for *El Confidencial*; *El Español* chooses WhatsApp, and *El HuffPost* opts for Youtube, although the rest of the media analysed do not consider it to be a social network.

What they do agree on is the social network that causes them the most upsets: Facebook. Its changes of algorithm and its opacity have made it into a friend-enemy. At *El Confidencial* each day they wonder where Facebook is going to place its hand: "On your head to push you under, on your shoulder to support you or in your pocket to take away your money?" Rodríguez says that one can have all three sensations on the same day. For all the media analysed, the change of algorithm in 2018 is the most remembered and caused the greatest concern. This was because Facebook prioritized the content of friends and relatives, causing the closure of social-media-dependent outlets and millennial press such us *Buzzfeed Spain* or *Eslang* (Negredo et al., 2019). In face of the resulting confusion and sharp decline in traffic, which exceeded 40%, the reaction of the media analysed consisted in diversifying topics to reach new audiences, launching more viral videos and testing other alternative tools like Google Discover or Flipboard. "We tried everything," Guillermo Rodríguez explained at *El Huffpost*:

> Publishing at different times, publishing more, less, different approaches, and in the end we understood that the golden age of Facebook wasn't going to return….But that change of algorithm also inoculated us to work on developing audiences in a much more integral way. (Guillermo Rodríguez, personal communication)

According to *El Español*, news related to politics, nutrition and the sciences works very well for them on Facebook, and they never publish on Friday evenings because the community is usually disconnected from Internet. In spite of that, they consider Facebook to be a capricious medium, which sometimes forces them to pay as much for increasing traffic as for seeking a public that they do not reach organically.

They consider that Facebook operates a very strict policy on content publication that has also affected their posts, eliminating some news items related to sex or violence. Due to these peculiarities at *El Huffpost* the traffic team is in charge of publishing content on Facebook, as they are experts at content and audience optimization. *Eldiario.es* prefers to elaborate specific content for this social network and they avoid overreacting when facing a change of algorithm: "Some media react by sharing news items about missing persons, creating alarm, but that is not the course we want to follow," Oliden concludes.

4.2.2. Increasing Frequency of Publication

A comparative study of the attention paid to Facebook and Twitter during the two years analysed confirms that there has been an increase in the volume of messages published on each network. *El Confidencial* set itself the goal of publishing 30 posts per day and 100 tweets in 2017. *El Español* applied a more aggressive strategy on Facebook with 80 posts and 96 tweets. *El HuffPost* did not include social media publication amongst its goals. In 2019 *El Confidencial* had risen to 96 posts and 144 tweets per day. Each month *El Español* publishes some 1,500 posts on Facebook and 2,500 tweets. *El HuffPost* has regularized its activity, with an average of 40 posts and 170 tweets a day. Only the figures for *Eldiario.es* remain steady, with 35 posts and 90 tweets published each day.

In addition to increasing the frequency of publication, the social media editor at *El Confidencial* adds that other recent novelties consist in dedicating more time to getting to know national and international tendencies, monitoring the activity of competitors and intensifying communication with the SEO team to develop joint strategies, such as employing different styles of language to address their followers depending on the channel.

Google Analytics, Chartbeat, Parse.ly, CrowdTangle and Buzzsumo are some of the monitoring tools employed that influence editorial decisions related to the production and distribution of content, although at *El HuffPost* they prefer to rely on the internal tools provided by Facebook and Twitter. This relevance of metrics responds to a global tendency known as 'analytics-driven

journalism' (Moyo, Mare, & Matsilele, 2019) that makes it possible to evaluate the impact, scope and relevance of news content.

The social media manager at *El Español*, Ana Delgado, states that the audience's importance is far greater than it was in 2017, and they must keep track of what its current interests are and what news generates more engagement:

> Previously a social media department's work was simply unidirectional, it was limited to distributing content. Now it is bidirectional, it gathers reactions and establishes conversations. At *El Español* we have learned that readers continue to be the most important pivot of our work and everything must be arranged around them. It is essential for us to base our work on data in order to identify and understand our audience. This is a prior step to implanting a microsystem of subscriptions….The role of readers as protagonists is now greater than ever, which means we must understand them much, much better. (Ana Delgado, personal communication)

The expectations generated in the journalistic sector by the potential of active audiences are largely based on the belief that interactivity creates loyalty (Sundet & Ytreberg, 2009). Krumsvik (2013) identified a typology of strategies for user involvement via social media for the news industry: the deliberation strategy, the donation strategy, the distribution strategy, and the data gathering strategy. The media analysed have prioritized the third strategy, sharing content, but they also appeal to the audience to express its opinion and take part in surveys, polls or quizzes, in order for it to perceive that the medium does not only sell content and thus achieve a high recurrence rate. Conversation improves engagement.

4.2.3. Adapting to Paywalls

The social media managers at online-native media state that they are better prepared for the paradigm change in accessing the online press and do not think that there will be a fall in the number of messages they produce for social media, even though the complete content is not diffused. According to Eva Moreno, at *El Confidencial*, "Our work will have to develop in keeping with 'paywall' strategies and, as a result, the social media department will also have to contribute value to the product we distribute" (Eva Moreno, personal communication). In September 2019 her medium launched ECPremium, a payment model that makes possible advance access to political and economic news items, designed especially for managers and institutions that must take short-term decisions based on such news.

Since its foundation in 2012, it has been a priority at *Eldiario.es* to obtain revenues through subscribers' quotas in order to increase the medium's independence. In 2019 this community consisted of 34,000 subscribers, who browse without any advertising, can access exclusive content before its open publication, and whose comments appear highlighted. With the arrival of new formulas for accessing content in the Spanish media system, Ander Oliden announced that *Eldiario.es* would never build a paywall around content:

> It would be desirable for subscription models to help eliminate content from the media that has an exclusively viral focus, often far removed from the values that those media claim to defend. This change should not entail abandoning the use of social media. (Ander Oliden, personal communication)

El Español already had 12,000 subscribers in 2017. For that reason its social media manager believes that his department will continue to have an equally relevant function, but its work will be much more qualitative than quantitative in character. Its regular tasks will include the possibility of transforming readers into subscribers.

At *El Huffpost* they are not considering a paywall in their business model, but they are convinced that to share a closed news story it is not necessary to be subscribed to the medium, because users talk on social media about news items without needing to read more than the headline that appears in a tweet.

The digital native media coincide in believing that payment models will be standardized in the short term, and that the movement of big traditional newspapers like *El País* or *La Vanguardia* will mark out the path for the rest. Additionally, over the next three years they foresee the implantation of publication models that are more automated, native content will be created for networks, user experience will be improved and the importance of clickbait will be reduced.

4.2.4. The Challenge of Disinformation

In the interviews conducted in 2017 the social media managers made no mention of disinformation. At that time the main goal was to increase traffic, without taking into account the collateral damage that would be caused by the proliferation of fake content and the need to create verification teams (Adair, Stencel, Clabby, & Li, 2019), in order to counter the phenomenon and reduce the widespread scepticism amongst readers who were questioning all types of content selection (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

At present, the spread of disinformation has resulted in greater precautions being taken by the social media managers in all the newsrooms analysed. The manager at *El Confidencial* says they are more careful about the news they publish and that there is greater contact between the social media team and the newsroom for joint questioning and verification. They believe that such mutual feedback is essential, and extreme caution is taken when dealing with political news.

At *El Huffpost* they are convinced that fake content has a greater impact than people realize, but they maintain a constructive attitude and think that, essentially, being permanently on the alert helps improve the situation. To speed up the process they prioritize official sources, videos and photographs about which there is absolute certainty that they were taken at the time and place stated. Ana Delgado, social media manager and video manager at *El Español*, agrees that priority should be given to primary sources, such as the institutions, politicians or other well-known figures:

> The concept of disinformation is highly debatable. Now conversations are much quicker and this phenomenon has become more evident via social media. But I believe that our work as journalists continues to consist, as always, in verifying information wherever it proceeds from. Journalists cannot publish news items that proceed from a social network unless that source is a primary one. (Ana Delgado, personal communication)

Finally, outsourcing verification is another of the strategies implemented. In January 2019 *Eldiario.es* signed a collaboration agreement with *Maldita.es*, a medium that specializes in countering disinformation. The goal was not to free the newsroom from searching for unfounded rumours, but instead to strengthen its commitment by putting a brake on fake news items, especially in an electoral year marked by great political instability. The contract consists in *Maldita.es* publishing content in *Eldiario.es* that exposes unfounded rumours related to immigration or human rights. Furthermore, they provide them with political statements subjected to fact-checking techniques that *Eldiario.es* publishes first, while publication on the *Maldita.es* website is embargoed for 24 hours. This collaboration has also made it possible to verify electoral debates in real time, and such vigilance helps the medium to function as a counter-power and resolve the distrust journalists feel towards politicians (Humanes, Martínez-Nicolás, & Saperas, 2013).

5. Conclusions

In the new information ecosystem, social media and online-native media occupy a privileged position. Both involve activity that has been 100% digital since their origin. This has favoured their connection and the presence in these newsrooms of a symbiotic attitude, open to the different existing formulas of participation. Collaboration is considered to be the sole formula for surviving in the temporalities of the media ecology (Dodds, 2019). In response to the first question posed, this investigation describes a scenario that distances the journalists at digital-native media from the digital divide found in traditional newsrooms, moving them closer to the profiles defined by Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) as 'pragmatic conformists' and 'enthusiastic activists.' In comparison with legacy media, social media managers at digital-native media consider that their staffs, in a state of permanent transition obliging them to work faster and more efficiently, are better prepared for reacting to the challenges presented by social media, which is why they feel closer to the audio-visual sector than to the traditional press.

Aware of the risks that derive from working with platforms like Facebook, whose change of algorithm directly affects their content production and its scope, this instability does not cast a shadow over their motives for participating actively on such platforms, which are concentrated on developing traffic, business and the brand. With its longitudinal approach, this article provides evidence that, two years on from the first round of interviews, there have been substantial changes in the routines of the participatory sections of digital-native media, although the search for traffic continues to be the main reason for their activity on social media. It is essential to be involved in the share-out of advertising, which is why their strategies are centred on seeking new audience targets, increasing their activity on social media, and constantly monitoring tendencies and the behaviour of users and competitors. The great difference is that now they are not as concerned about the quantity as about the quality of the readers they attract, in case the latter are potential subscribers. Users are not just numbers, they must by captured with names and surnames. To achieve that goal the tendency is towards forming specialized teams according to the social network, which construct more personalized messages adapted to the particular channel. It is surprising to find that while the effort dedicated to social networks has increased and been rationalized, the traffic proceeding from those spaces has fallen.

Although the digital native media analysed have distinctive features, in general similarities were found in how they manage social media and they are optimistic as they perceive that their activity will grow. Although uncertainty continues to form part of their routines and their strategies are guided by the technique of trial and error, they see more opportunities than disadvantages in their relation with social media. This relation has matured because they act more prudently and collaboratively with the newsroom to avoid spreading disinformation, while the stage of obsession with Facebook has also become shorter. This reshaping of their dependence, predicted by Ekström and Westlund (2019), has resulted in the field of experimentation now being situated in Instagram, and they are confident that audio-visual content will be profitable in the future. Paradoxically, they believe that this future will be determined by the movements made by the most relevant traditional newspapers, although the audience will continue to be the axis of change. The tendency of activity on social media will consist in spreading quality content, subscription tools and winning the trust of the young public.

With respect to the limitations of the study, an analysis of four cases is not a basis for generalization, but this exploration of their activity could be extended to the rest

of the media that form part of the census drawn up by Salaverría et al. (2018). Additionally, we suggest pursuing the qualitative approaches that make it possible to know how legacy media journalists and audiences perceive the work developed by the online-native media, identify the causes of the fall in social media traffic, and even suggest prospective studies that make it possible to determine whether online-native media will end up forming part of legacy media in the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Information Quality in Latin American Digital Native Media: Analysis Based on Structured Dimensions and Indicators

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Abstract
The current communicative ecosystem has profoundly transformed journalistic work and the media, generating with great eagerness the emergence of digital native media that do not follow the logic of their conventional peers. Although the advent of these media is not entirely negative, as they create multiple voices that contribute to pluralism, their quality has undoubtedly been questioned on several academic fronts. This work analyzes the most important Latin American digital native media by number of accesses (traffic), using a taxonomy of evaluation of dimensions of the informative quality, in which aspects such as informative sources, uses of international news agencies, correction of contents and factuality levels, ideological plurality in their opinion contents, among others, are taken into consideration. Of the emerging results, the 'use of statistical indicators' was the least rated (32.5%), mainly due to a lack of data journalism in the media studied. It is also worth noting that the indicator 'comments and monitoring' obtained the second-lowest rating, indicating an absence of conversation between the media and its audience through the comments section of each content.

Keywords
digital media; fake news; information quality; journalism; Latin America

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1. Introduction

With the rise and popularization of Internet and social networks, conventional media opened their digital channels—webs, podcasts, streaming, fan pages—not only because the informative consumption began to migrate its platforms, but also because new digital native media that escaped from the informative logics prevailing in past centuries were born (Romero-Rodríguez, De-Casas-Moreno, & Torres-Toukoumidis, 2016), especially regarding editorial verification processes (Salaverría, 2005), information review structures, financing methods, and even the training and experience of new content creators who did not necessarily come from journalism (García-Serrano, Romero-Rodríguez, & Hernando Gómez, 2019; Romero-Rodríguez & Aguaded, 2018). This model that brings with it new information vices such as fake news (see Albright, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018; Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018), clickbait (Molyneux & Coddington, 2019), pseudo-journalistic infoxication, and others, leads to a loss of confidence before their audiences (Novak, 2018; Samuel-Arzan & Hayat, 2019).

Latin America has not been oblivious to these changes and mediamorphosis. From the Caribbean to Patagonia, the 20 Latin American countries have witnessed the birth of digital native media projects in the

last two decades, which on many occasions achieve high levels of consolidation (Salaverría, Rivera-Rogel, & González-Córdova, 2019; Salaverría, Sábada, Breiner, & Warner, 2018), despite the fact that in many countries of the region there are still significant inequalities of access to information due to digital gaps of economic, age, and geographical reasons (Lotero-Echeverri, Romero-Rodríguez, & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2018).

In this context, where the presumption is a preponderant activity, the quality of the contents constitutes one of the needs towards which the media—digital or not—must turn their gaze. Therefore, their activity is not limited to being the environment of exhibition of the contents generated, protected under the idea of freedom offered by the Internet and especially by social networks.

Terms such as 'post-truth,' 'disinformation,' and 'fake news' have become particularly relevant in recent years, together with a greater interest on the part of users in consuming entertainment and pseudo-content but with little or no informative value. This implies that the notion of quality is not only subordinated to the productive routines of the media, but also to the role of the user as a consumer and producer of content.

Defining 'information quality' is not an easy task, since the very epistemology of 'quality' has subjective connotations, or is at least dependent on cultural perceptions—with specific standards linked to norms and values (Leggatt, 1996; Michnik & Lo, 2009; Rosengren, Tagerud, & Carlsson, 1996). In fact, it is almost impossible to reach a consensus on the meaning of 'information quality' among journalists, academics, and audiences (Baskarada & Koronios, 2014; Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano, & Palau-Sampio, 2013; Urban & Schweiger, 2014; Wallisch, 1995), because while for the latter 'quality' may reflect the expositive clarity of the message, or be implicit in the brand of the medium it publishes, information quality for a journalist may be related to the time it has taken him to access suitable sources and verify information (Baskarada & Koronios, 2014; Gómez-Mompart et al., 2013; Urban & Schweiger, 2014; Wallisch, 1995). On the other hand, from an academic point of view, there have been several proposals on quality, being the main ones identified in Table 1.

In terms of the quality of digital information, it has been shown that this one is crucial in areas such as media reputation (Madhikermi, Kubler, Robert, Buda, & Framling, 2016), innovation and return on investment (Lee, Chen, & Hartmann, 2016), audience confidence (Berezan, Yoo, & Christodoulidou, 2016), user satisfaction (Ghasemaghaei & Hassanein, 2016; Leite, Gonçalves, Teixeira, & Rocha, 2016), and receiver market loyalty (Wang, Li, Li, & Wang, 2014).

2. Taxonomies and Models for Evaluating Information Quality in Digital Media

Most of the models and taxonomies of analysis of informative quality has been carried out with analogies of evaluation structures of printed media. Urban and Schweiger (2014) structure six dimensions of information quality: 1) diversity (of points of view and sources); 2) relevance (in terms of the usefulness of information for decision-making); 3) accuracy (of information in relation to events); 4) comprehensibility (in terms of what should be understandable to audiences); 5) impartiality (to ensure neutral and balanced information coverage); and 6) ethics (to respect people's fundamental rights and maintain moral attitudes).

Costera-Meijer (2012) presents a second method of evaluating and valuing journalism from user experiences through common patterns such as participation (interactive component), representation (semantic component), and presentation (aesthetic component). A third model, authored by van der Wurff and Schönbach (2011), catalogues and assesses the elements and the informative quality in terms of codes of conduct and transparency from a scale of 5 points as follows: carefully check the facts (4.7); separate editorial content from advertising (4.6); complete the identification of sources (4.5); avoid the use of pseudonyms by journalists (4.4); do not manipulate images or statements (4.4), plurality of opinions (4.4); understandability of information (4.2); transparency, (4.1); separate facts from opinions (4.1); objectivity (3.9); protection of privacy (3.8); classification of news by importance (3.7); separate entertainment information (3.5); only publish information with informative values (3.0); publish quickly (2.9); respond to requests from audiences (2.4); and entertain the audience (2.2).

Integrating the four previous models, Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2016) carry out an integrated model of assessment and evaluation of information quality, in which 75 indicators are divided into three macro-dimensions: pre-communicative factors of the media as a business; socio-labor and educational situation of the journalists; and analysis of the content. In addition to being validated by a three-way Delphi, this model has had an application test in Spanish and Venezuelan media (Romero-Rodríguez & Aguaded, 2018), as a pilot test to verify its usability in European and Latin American contexts.

3. Materials and Methods

The research is of mixed nature and is carried out in the Latin American context. An analysis of the content of the most important digital native media of 20 countries in the region was carried out based on a taxonomy of dimensions and qualitative indicators expressed in the third macro-dimension of Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2016), which focuses on the evaluation of the informative contents of the media.

The objective is to determine the quality of content published by digital native media in Latin America and to make a comparison between the media under study. For the purposes of the scope of this research, a codebook was elaborated with the different variables

Table 1. 'Information quality' from the academic perspective.

Author(s)	Contribution
Halloran, Elliot, and Murdock (1970); Lang & Lang (1953); Meyer (1987)	The formula of having informative quality is to measure the integrity and objectivity of a journalistic narration, for which a contrast of the information published directly with the eyewitnesses of an event has to be made.
Rosengren (1979)	The most appropriate method to verify the existence of informative quality is to contrast journalistic discourse with statistical data or independent documentation.
McQuail (1992)	He defines the quality of information from the perspective of the public interest, which is why the criteria for its evaluation are derived from Western values such as freedom, equality, and order.
Schultz (1996, 2000)	The quality of information depends on three existential elements: the availability of adequate resources; a political and legal order that protects and guarantees the freedom of the exercise of the media; and the adherence of the journalist to professional standards. Aspects such as the diversity of media, ideologies represented, and objectivity are also essential. The quality of information is not only subjected to the internal conditions of the medium, but also to the context in which it is inserted.
Picard (2004)	Information quality occurs when the number of information produced by the organization itself is more significant than that generated by external agents and when information and education deprive people of entertainment content, bearing in mind that this own content must follow a method of obtaining information, such as having a variety and contrast of information sources, as well as technical efficiency of the organization to allow products to be organized and understandable.
Bates (2005); Hjørland (2007)	Objectivity does not necessarily define information quality since subjective perceptions and views of a fact are also information in themselves.
Bird (2010); Costera-Meijer (2012); Madianou (2010); Martin (2008)	The excellence in the exercise of journalism is faced with changes in habits of informative consumption, a trend that prioritizes entertainment content over any evidence of quality.
Mai (2013)	Consumers are no longer looking for any information; they are looking for complete information about their interests on the Internet. In this sense, quality is present in informative completeness.

of the study, which were proposed taking as reference the previous research carried out by Romero-Rodríguez and Aguaded (2016), duly validated in Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2016) and Rivera-Rogel, Zuluaga-Arias, Ramírez, Romero-Rodríguez, and Aguaded (2017), which evaluates the quality of media content around 10 variables, each rated with a relative score based on the importance attributed to the quality of the content.

The variables selected for the development of this study are those that exclusively evaluate the quality of the information from the final product (see Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2016) and are applied to the digital native media of Latin America. These variables are detailed in Table 2.

Assigning a score to each variable was not an easy task, since there are no defined standards to value the journalistic contents of the media, and since quality is something intangible, its value is linked to universally accepted values (Puente, 2004). For this reason, for the assignment of the highest scores, the basic principles of journalism have been considered, which emphasize the commitment to truth, the contrast of sources, and the disassociation of political and economic interests as fundamental journalistic practices. These were valued on 10 points and the others between 5, 4, 3, and 2 respectively, based on expert opinion.

Traditional indicators such as precision and objectivity are implicitly valued in the variables considered in this study, such as: obtaining information, sources, content, and use of statistics, all of which make it possible to contrast and deepen the published information, it being impossible in absolute terms—as is logical—to evaluate objectivity based on any taxonomy or model.

For the development of the content analysis of the media understudy, a nonprobabilistic constructed week sample was carried out (Krippendorff, 1997; Stempel, 1989) for three months: from August to October 2019 (Table 3). The constructed week model is frequently used in qualitative studies and contemplates a random and stratified selection of samples for study trying to

Table 2. Dimensions and assessment of the informational quality of digital media content.

Dimension	Scope	Score
Comments and monitoring	Evaluates the existence of comment sections on the media page and whether the administrator is involved.	2
Obtaining information	Evaluates the amount of information that comes from the media's production routines, and that is taken from news agencies and other media.	5
Sources	The number of sources, informative contrast, direct sources, and identification of sources.	10
Contents	Focused on the format of presentation of the contents of the media, specifically to the use of journalistic genres and the types of contents they develop (political, social, community).	3
Geographical diversity	It allows knowing if the media focuses on the city, country, or region to which they belong and if it takes other regions with the same importance.	2
Opinion	Ideological balance in the opinion section observing the diversity of columnists and collaborators who write for the media.	10
Headline	Concerning the content of the note: short, informative, and guiding.	4
Presentation quality	Presence of the five W's of journalism (what, who, when, where, why—and how) and correction of the language.	10
Use of stats	Correctly uses statistical indicators and infographics.	2
Photographs	Use of videos and photographs to support information.	2

represent all the days of the week in an equitable way, and in this particular case, considering the daily and monthly variations in the media publications, this sampling method adjusts to the cyclical character of the information together with the variability of the informative agendas of the media. Thus, media publications were chosen for the Monday of the first week of the first month, Tuesday of the second week, Wednesday of the third week, Thursday of the fourth week, and so on until Sunday and completing one week, after which the week is repeated under the same dynamic until completing the three months of the study.

Table 3. Sampling schedule.

Month	Week	Day
August	1	Monday 5
	2	Tuesday 13
	3	Wednesday 21
	4	Thursday 29
September	1	Friday 6
	2	Saturday 14
	3	Sunday 22
	4	Monday 23
October	1	Tuesday 1
	2	Wednesday 9
	3	Thursday 17
	4	Friday 25

As it is a research on digital native media, it is necessary to point out that the review was carried out around the contents generated during the 24 hours of the selected days, which allows for the evaluation of a considerable number of informative units. The purpose is to collect the contents published in this diversity of fluctuations, and not only at a certain time.

The media to be studied were identified through the media directory Sembramedia, according to which there are 669 digital native media in Latin America: Argentina (64), Bolivia (11), Brazil (76), Chile (63), Colombia (82), Costa Rica (20), Cuba (15), Ecuador (48), El Salvador (13), Guatemala (19), Honduras (9), Mexico (75), Nicaragua (14), Panama (7), Paraguay (11), Peru (41), Puerto Rico (9), Dominican Republic (26), Uruguay (25), and Venezuela (52). To these are added 25 others classified as regional.

In this context, 20 digital native media were selected (Table 4), one for each country, having a website being the primary requirement, since Sembramedia considers fan pages on Facebook, Twitter profiles, YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine channels within the formats of digital native media. Another criterion for media selection was their position in the Alexa.com ranking.

4. Results

The analysis evaluated the quality of digital native media content in Latin America, considering the ten variables described in Table 3. It is necessary to emphasize that quality is an intangible property, but not impossi-

Table 4. Analysis units.

Country	Media	Website	Position in Alexa Country Ranking
Argentina	*Chequeado*	www.chequeado.com	614
Bolivia	*Periódico Digital PIEB*	www.pieb.com.bo	1180
Brazil	*La Lupa*	https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa	35
Chile	*The Times Chile*	https://thetimes.cl	55
Colombia	*Pulzo*	www.pulzo.com	3
Costa Rica	*CR Hoy*	www.crhoy.com	3
Cuba	*14 y medio*	www.14ymedio.com	7907
Ecuador	*Primicias*	www.primicias.ec	105
El Salvador	*La Página*	www.lapagina.com.sv	7
Guatemala	*Soy 502*	www.soy502.com	4
Honduras	*Tiempo hn*	https://tiempo.hn	7
Mexico	*Aristegui Noticias*	https://aristeguinoticias.com	102
Nicaragua	*Confidencial*	www.confidencial.com.ni	59
Panama	*Lucir Bien*	www.lucirbien.com	343
Paraguay	*Smash*	https://medium.com/smashasu	76
Peru	*La Mula*	www.lamula.pe	861
Puerto Rico	*Noticel*	www.noticel.com	56
Dominican Republic	*Acento*	http://acento.com.do	63
Uruguay	*Dnegocios.uy*	www.dnegocios.uy	1.299.663
Venezuela	*El Cooperante*	www.elcooperante.com	132

ble to value, since to each variable to measure the quality of the contents was assigned a score based on expert judgment.

Through the variable 'comments,' it became evident that all the media include not only comment sections, but other forms of interaction such as forums and voting/valuation of the news, but do not develop an interaction with the user, a transcendental issue if we consider that comments are the way to enable communication between the media and users, something that has been since before the arrival of the Internet, through letters to the director, telephone calls and, in more modern times, messages through cell phones (Pinto, Barredo, Arcila, & Suing, 2018), but that in the digital context can be a tool that allows the media to visualize how to monetize content.

In spite of the fact that the evaluation of the commentary sections of the digital native media constitutes a key exercise—considering that through them the media promotes the development of a critical perspective of the users in front of the contents that the media offers them, while motivating their credibility—they cannot be an indicator of the quality of the media, since it is not demonstrated that the users have the competences to develop quality contents or to influence in the construction of the informative unit.

Concerning the 'obtaining of information,' the digital native media bet for the most part on the development of journalistic routines that allow them to obtain their information, with which they can compete with other media. It is no less accurate that news agencies are present in the media, especially in the international news sections, and to a lesser extent other media since it is almost impossible for these digital ventures to have their correspondents outside their borders. This does not imply the existence of quality in the process of obtaining information, because they do not develop their own research routine that allows the medium to contrast with primary sources, and at the same time give them the appropriate space according to their relevance, contextualize the facts, and avoid informational distortion.

On the 'informative sources,' a variety of them is observed in a general way, especially in means like *Chequeado* (Colombia) and *La Lupa* (Brazil), dedicated to the verification of information. *Aristegui Noticias* (Mexico) is not far from it either. The opposite case is observed in *Pulzo* (Colombia), *PIEB* (Bolivia), and *Dnegocios* (Uruguay), where there is a limited number of direct sources, and instead, they refer to publications of informative agencies or other means of the country. Others, such as *The Times Chile* (Chile), *El Cooperante* (Venezuela), *Dnegocios* (Uruguay), and *14 y medio* (Cuba), use one or no direct source, their style being conversational rather than informative.

The evaluation of information sources is essential to measure the quality of a journalistic work. This study took into consideration the number, characteristics, origin, and initiative of sources. In this sense, the existence of a diversity of types of sources is evident. The media analyzed use documents and statements from which they make analyses and interpretations. They also use other media as informative references, although there is a prevalence of 'unisourcism,' as well as the use of two and three sources. No less common is the use of official pages and social networks, and the same form of information from international agencies. In addition, it

should be noted that direct interviews are not appreciated. These results show that there is no adequate management of sources.

Regarding 'media content,' the most exploited genres are news, over reporting, chronicle, and other genres. This corresponds to the logic of the mass media in general since news is the genre that occupies the most significant space in printed editions and radio and television news, but which is also better used given the immediacy and volatility of digital information. The reports are developed according to the need for topics that require a broad contextualization and a detailed treatment, and not immediate as news require. In addition, there is the use of headlines as a means of drawing the reader in. There was no evidence of the use of headlines unlinked from the content to attract readers (click-baiting), except in sponsored content where this practice does occur, as observed in *La Página* (El Salvador) and *El Cooperante* (Venezuela).

In this framework, from the point of view of quality, it is necessary to differentiate the contents that are presented under the journalism label, developed without control and created specifically to attract clicks, helping to feed the infoxication sphere where the user does not yet establish the skills that allow him to discriminate quality contents on the Web.

On the other hand, the exercise of investigative journalism by media such as *CR Hoy* (Costa Rica), *Aristegui Noticias* (Mexico), and *Acento* (Dominican Republic), which present more extensive investigations carried out in-depth with a diversity of sources and information, is noteworthy. In addition to this, it is emphasized that Latin American media bet on a diverse content, not centered on one country, but covering the region they are part of and the world, maintaining the global logic of the digital media. Despite this, *Tiempo hn* (Honduras), *14 y medio* (Cuba), *Periódico Digital PIEB* (Bolivia), *Chequeado* (Argentina), *Primicias* (Ecuador), and *El Cooperante* (Venezuela) are media that mostly develop national information.

The presence of opinion within the media is an aspect that is worth highlighting, since in certain contexts it can contribute to orienting social discussion on various topics, but it is no less true that on the other hand, it can become an aggregate of personal positions, which the media rarely contrasts with opinions of different kinds, thus encouraging the reader to opt for access to different points of view, especially if it is open access. The study noted that only *La Lupa* (Brazil) does not offer free access to this section and requires a paid subscription. In the other cases, most media include opinion sections dedicated especially to the analysis of various topics including, but not limited to, politics.

Except for *Lucir Bien* (Panama), *Smash* (Paraguay), *La Mula* (Peru), and *Dnegocios* (Uruguay), all other media include opinion sections. In these sections, *14 y medio* (Cuba), *Confidencial* (Nicaragua), and *El Cooperante* (Venezuela) develop an opinion section openly contrary to the regime of their countries, which is also reflected in the informative treatment of the news. It is important to note that *Lucir Bien* (Panamá), *Noticel* (Puerto Rico), *Dnegocios* (Uruguay), and *Smash* (Paraguay) have focused on issues of social interest, detached from politics and rooted in culture, social issues, technology, business, and entertainment, covering issues that are not present in the media that focus mostly on political immediacy.

On the variant 'quality,' it was generally evident that the digital native media develop journalistic practices that aim towards innovation, both in content and in the way they are presented; however, there are notable differences between them. Media such as *Chequeado* (Argentina), *CR Hoy* (Costa Rica), *La Lupa* (Brazil), and *Aristegui Noticias* (Mexico) have bet towards the use not only of photography as a means of illustration of their contents but also of audiovisuals and infographics, which has allowed some of them like *La Lupa* (Brazil) to restrict access to all their materials, a subscription being necessary, which can be a useful source of financing considering the interest of the themes and narrative resources. This is especially important if one believes that new media must, at the same time, seek alternative sources to advertising to sustain themselves.

Perhaps, for this reason, the media mentioned above occupy relevant places in their countries according to the ranking of Alexa.com. All of them are among the top 50, with the exception of *Aristegui Noticias* (Mexico), which is not even in the top 100. In the case of Colombia, *Pulzo*, and Costa Rica, *CR Hoy*, both media are third in the ranking, only after Google and YouTube. Uruguay is perhaps the country where digital native media has not yet finished positioning itself among users by the number of visits.

Finally, 'photographs and other multimedia resources' are an essential part of digital publications, as is the 'use of statistical resources.' The latter was only observed in a quarter of the media, while photographs are present in all media. It is worth noting the use of other resources such as infographics, audios, videos, and downloadable documents, which complement the information. Media such as *Soy 502* (Guatemala), *La Página* (El Salvador), and *Aristegui Noticias* (Mexico) include complete sections of multimedia material and even live broadcasts. Others use photographs only to illustrate information, although they do not always belong to the information, as in the case of *El Cooperante* (Venezuela) and *Dnegocios* (Uruguay; Table 5).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The constant management of information is a practice that must be conditioned by the application of quality parameters. However, this does not always lead to economic returns for the media as a business. This reality leads to the construction of different models of information quality that respond to specific environments. The parameters proposed here are aimed at analyzing the

Table 5. Assessment of digital native media content.

Media	Comments and monitoring (2)	Obtaining information (5)	Sources (10)	Contents (3)	Geographical diversity (2)	Opinion (10)	Headline (4)	Presentation quality (10)	Use of stats (2)	Photographs (2)	Total
Chequeado	2	5	10	3	2	10	4	10	2	2	50
Periódico Digital PIEB	1	2.5	6	3	1	5	4	8	2	0.5	33
La Lupa	1	5	10	3	2		4	10	2	2	39
The Times Chile	1	5	5	3	2	10	4	8	2	2	42
Pulzo	1	2.5	5	3	2	10	4	6	0	2	35.5
CR Hoy	1	5	10	3	2	10	4	10	1	2	48
14 y medio	1	5	10	3	2	5	4	10	0	2	42
Primicias	1	5	8	3	2	10	4	10	2	2	47
La Página	1	5	8	3	2	10	4	6	0	2	41
Soy 502	1	5	8	3	2	10	4	10	0	2	45
Tiempo hn	1	5	10	3	2	10	4	10	0	2	47
Aristegui Noticias	1	5	10	3	2	10	4	10	2	2	49
Confidencial	1	5	8	3	2	5	4	8	0	2	38
Lucir Bien	1	5	9	3	2	0	4	10	0	2	36
Smash	1	5	5	3	2	0	4	9	0	2	31
La Mula	1	5	10	3	2	0	4	10	0	2	37
Noticel	1	5	10	3	2	5	4	8	0	2	40
Acento	1	3	10	3	2	5	4	8	0	2	38
Dnegocios	1	3	3	3	2	0	4	10	0	1	27
El Cooperante	1	3	4	3	2	0	4	5	0	1	23
Total	1.05	4.45	7.95	3	1.95	6.05	4	8.8	0.65	1.83	39.73

content of the medium as a final product, which evaluates ten dimensions: comments and monitoring, obtaining information, sources, content, geographical diversity, opinion, title, quality of presentation, use of stats, and photographs (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2016).

It is essential to consider that any information practice requires quality guarantees, which seeks to make the media responsible for the quality of the information they publish, considering the dimensions analyzed in this study. The study shows that, although there is an interest in the quality of content in digital native media—evidenced in the variety of content, use of diverse sources, quality of presentation, resources used, and geographical diversity—this is not a constant in the totality of the media analyzed, added to the fact that the way of applying the different dimensions studied are not directly synonymous with quality; for example, a greater number of sources does not necessarily imply that the final product has quality, as explained above.

The dimensions that reach the highest score with 100% are 'content' and 'headline.' This is mainly because digital native media tend to renew their content constantly without considering the innovation of their professional procedures and technological resources. On the other hand, it has to be considered that changes in users' consumption habits have motivated them not only to generate their own content, but also to look for topics that respond to their interests, which are not always informative, but tend more towards entertainment and fiction. The latter is what makes the consumption of falsified information possible and the promotion of the misinformative phenomenon that is spread mainly as entertainment.

The least valued dimensions are precisely those related to the characteristics of digital journalism: 'comments and monitoring' (52.5%) and 'use of statistical indicators' (32.5%). That is to say that the media do not give importance to the participation of users, which is a critical point because participation could serve, at the same time, to contrast the effectiveness of the media and journalists and to select the subject matter that makes up the thematic agenda of the media. On the other hand, a pending issue for the media under study is the use of technical indicators (data journalism), that today is cru-

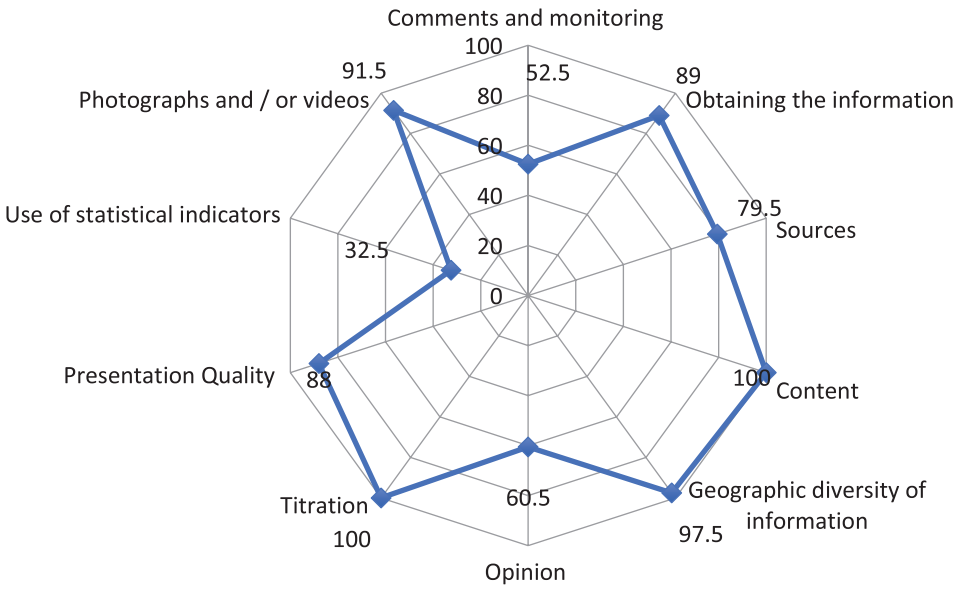

Figure 1. Average rating (in percent) of dimensions of digital native media in Latin America.

cial for enriching the information (see Figure 1). The results of these two dimensions make it possible to contrast what was stated in the previous paragraph, even though the media do not give way to the new modalities and languages that digital native media demand.

In spite of the fact that in many countries of the region there are still vast inequalities of access to information due to digital gaps of economic, age, and geographical reasons (Lotero-Echeverri et al., 2018), the more than 669 digital native media registered in Latin America are a sample of the expansion of new media in Latin America. These results also support the study by Salaverría et al. (2019), in the sense that digital native media in the last two decades, in many occasions, managed to reach high degrees of consolidation.

From the analysis, it emerges that the means that achieve the maximum score is *Chequeado*, from Argentina (50 points), and the one who scored the least is *El Cooperante* (Venezuela), with 23 points. However, all the media under study should improve certain aspects, such as the use of multimedia as a way to capture the interest of users in different platforms (see Figure 2).

The quality of the information found in Latin America's digital native media cannot be evaluated only through the final product (content), since this analysis can be incomplete or subjective, added to the fact that more and more media are pointing to the development of content based on investigative journalism. Thus, a complete evaluation of the quality of the information must take into account all the aspects involved in the cre-

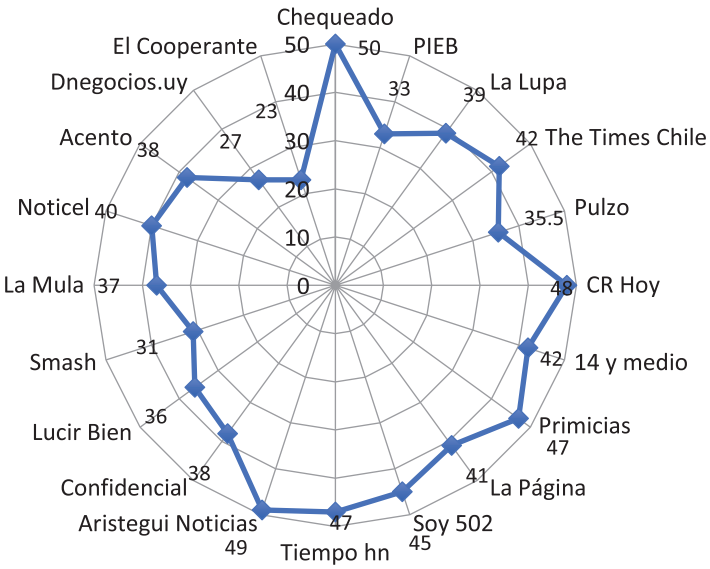

Figure 2. Global scoring of Latin America's digital native media.

ation of the information, starting from the business nature of the medium and its pre-communicative factors (economic, political, and social), to the socio-labor situation of the journalists.

The path to quality media content should consider different criteria for its shaping. In this sense, the present study could constitute a reference and background framework applicable from its own experience and context.

The authors of this research recognize that in the process of evaluating the quality of digital native media, the focus on content is not sufficient to determine the quality of the media as a whole, due to the factors mentioned above: changes in consumer habits; increased misinformation; entertainment; among others. Therefore, the present study constitutes a first approach to the evaluation of the quality of the contents of the digital native media in Latin America, and will serve as a support for future studies that allow for the visualization of other aspects of the digital media in Latin America: business factors; economic issues of the news company; social and labor situation of its journalists; as well as issues related to the distribution of information. In the same way, a future challenge will be the study of the influences of various actors, such as political, corporative, economic, and social ones in the generation of content in digital native media.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Native Media and Business Models: Comparative Study of 14 Successful Experiences in Latin America

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Abstract
From its onset on the 1990s, both digital native (with sister headings on the analog platform) as digital native news media have experienced a constant transformation process. The accelerated technological evolution linked to the changing information consumption habits of the users demanded a constant reinvention capability. Furthermore, the need for profit and the drop in advertisement sales have pushed the media to redefine their structure, content and social media presence. The Ibero-American scene has experienced a sprout of a mixture of digital native news media. They are journalistic projects, conceived from and on the Internet, which have reached considerable renown and becoming reference media on the information level. Internet prompted a reduction of the costs related to the creation of media outlets. However, the establishment of a sustainable business model is one of the main challenges. The research presented looks at the business models of Ibero-American digital native news media based on a comparative analysis of 14 case studies, alongside interviews with their founders. The findings include, among other things, a tendency for business models based on diverse and hyper-specialized content targeted at micro-audiences. This research found an interest in horizontality, participation and user engagement, and noticed the need for these media to diversify their income sources.

Keywords
business model; digital native; journalism; native digital media; news media

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1. Introduction

The development and establishment of a sustainable business model has become one of the main challenges in the journalism industry lately. Free content and a dependency on an advertisement model have influenced the consumption habits of the audience and they have made it difficult to find effective economic return proposals. Among digital editions derived from analog media (especially the case of newspapers) there has been a surge of a variety of digital native news media. Internet has introduced a reduction in the costs related to the design, creation and functioning of media outlets. Bearing in mind that a great amount of research on journalism is carried out from an Anglo-Saxon perspective—or in an Anglo-Saxon sphere—we chose to focus on the conceptual region known as Ibero-America, understood, according to different authors (see Birle, 2016; Galindo, 2010; Martin Serrano, 2004), as a "space" beyond a mere geo-linguistic area, tracing cultural, socio-political and socio-economic relationships, that shape the journalistic traditions of the countries within it. The arrival of

native digital media, particularly in the Ibero-American scene, is a consequence of the new communication juncture, clearly marked by a new user profile and new gadgets that had an impact of the production and distribution of information content. In this context, digital native news media face a process of constant transformation (Neuberger, Nuernbergk, & Langenohl, 2019) that affects their production and distribution systems, the audience profiles, the journalistic roles and, specially, the business models (Adira et al., 2018; García & González, 2012).

Deuze (2003), Pavlik (2005), Flores and Aguado (2005), Salaverría (2005, 2008), Domínguez and Pérez (2012), Jarvis (2015), Chan-Olmsted and Shay (2016) or Schroeder (2018), among others, have highlighted in the last decade the importance to reformulate business models for media on the Internet and, among other aspects, to invest in better quality content (Palacio, 2018; Rodríguez & Soloaga, 2017). Thus, we can point out that innovation (Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson, & Ballon, 2014), which includes all the steps in the process and in the media structures, has become one of the challenges for the media (Carlson & Usher, 2016).

From that starting point, this research analyzes the characteristics and specificities of the business model of 14 Ibero-American digital native news media, through a case study of each of them, a comparative analysis between them and a series of interviews with their founders or directors. Stemming from that main objective, the specific goals are to 1) analyze and compare the value offer for each of the selected digital native news media; 2) classify the typology of distribution and sales channels, as well as content and topics offered in each on them; 3) study the typology of the income sources and other types of resources that each Project addresses in their business model; 4) point out the common threads and divergences between the various proposals studied here; and 5) identify the main trends in the sector in the definition and execution of a business model.

To achieve those goals, the study expected to answer three main research questions, namely:

RQ1: How is the business model of digital native news media designed in terms of horizontality, participation and audience engagement?

RQ2: How does the content offer by digital native news media responds to increasing diversity and hyper-specialization?

RQ3: What is the trend on digital native news media regarding income stream diversification beyond advertisement sales?

2. Theoretical Framework

Internet has changed the way current media organize themselves and the way we consume information (Martín Serrano, 2004), at the same time as it has fostered the creation of new digital native journalistic projects and proposals. In this environment, the need to make a profit and the transformations in advertisement investment have pushed digital media to redefine their structures, the typology of their contents and the routines of journalism production, at a juncture of interrelations between different economic, political, labor, technological, and cultural subsystems that make up the entire social system (Parra Luna, 2003). Media industry has experienced in the last three decades a series of transformations or reconfigurations (Cervi, Paredes, & Pérez Tornero, 2010) that have altered the way of structuring, operating and define information companies. Multimedia convergence (Castells, 2010; Dailey, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Salaverría, 2003; Scolari, 2004), as the main element in the shake-up, has led to profound changes that reach technological, entrepreneurial, production, distribution, professional, narrative and consumption practices, in a cross-sectional and multimodal form, that have permeated all dimensions of media in an environment reacting to the impact of big data (Schlesinger & Doyle, 2015).

It is under these circumstance that the target audience as a final product (Ventín, 2004), through which added value is generated, is being questioned as the main commercialization model in the information industry, prompting an economic crisis in the sector (Cabezuelo-Lorenzo, 2013) and underlying a restructuration of the media ecosystem in Ibero-America through the concentration of media companies (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017; Gutiérrez Rentería & López Hernández, 2014). This concentration has defined the role of the communication professionals (Cottle, 2007; Salaverría & Negredo, 2008; Scolari, Navarro, Pardo Kuklinski, Micó, & Coll, 2006; Tejedor, 2011), defining new tasks based on the dynamics brought about by the digitization of production and content distribution paradigms that have modified narrative structures (Gosciola, 2012) and have allowed for new consumption forms in audiences that have transformed into "users…or production, overseeing and distribution agents" (Ventín, 2018, p. 70) of the contents often viralized through digital social media networks (Chaykowski, 2018).

These changes have altered the requirements and professional competences demanded of future graduates and offered in schools and universities teaching communication or journalism (Tejedor & Cervi, 2017). However, between 30% and 40% of all new media companies created in Latin-American are unable to survive after the fourth year of having been created (Sembramedia, 2018) or, when they survive, they do so with considerable adjustments (Rubio Hancock, 2019). The culture of free contents is another aspect that has made it difficult to find a successful business model. According to the Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, and Nielsen (2019, p. 13), there is a growing "subscription fatigue" and users, especially the youngest ones, opt to pay for Netflix and Spotify for content, rather than for news media and plat-

Table 1. Elements of the Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas.

Clients (3 blocks): Market segments, channels and relations
Offer (1 block): Value offer Infrastructure (3 blocks): Key activities, key resources and key partnerships Economic viability (2 blocks): Cost structures and revenue flows

Source: Osterwalder (2010).

forms. The development and application of a successful business model becomes, thus, one of the main challenges of the media industry, particularly in the case of journalism. Harlow and Salaverría (2016) developed a mapping of the emergent overview of digital media news websites in Latin America. They conclude that there is a tendency for renovation in the traditional modes of journalism, among other aspects, and they highlighted the importance of reconsidering or renovating the relationship between journalism, alternate media and activism.

The business model can be defined as the way in which an organization dynamically articulates three main components to generate revenue and benefits (Demil & Lecocq, 2009) in a sustainable manner. It is, in the end, a matter of strategic planning undertaken to serve the project's dynamic by fostering comprehension, creativity and reflexivity (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2016). The Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas structures a basic scheme of the idea of the business in four areas (clients, offer, infrastructure and finance) and nine interrelated elements that follow a logical sequence divided in the following elements: value offer, key partnerships, key activities, client relations, market segment, key resources, channels, cost structure and revenue sources (see Table 1).

The model establishes a series of interrelations between its elements (see Table 2). On the one hand, headings 1–5 deal with the elements that generate income that supports the business model; whereas headings 6–9 indicate the way in which the offer or value proposal will be made. The numbers help in establishing the execution sequence, with value offer or market segment selection the starting points, depending on the relevance one or the other has for the entrepreneur.

The need to be profitable and the transformations of advertisement investment have pushed digital media to redefine their structures, content typology and journalistic routines. The content on offer performs a major role in digital native news media business models. In this sense, in Spain, for instance, only 44% of the citizens trust the media, while 34% provides value to news available through search engines on cyberspace. In the case of digital social media networks, only 23% of Internet users grants credibility to the news they read on these platforms (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018; Newman et al., 2019).

These dynamics and trends, that shape up the Spanish media landscape, are replicated in the global industry of digital media and invite a holistic reflection on digital native news media and their ability to become profitable. A study by García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, De Lara-González, and Arias-Robles (2018), that analyzes 25 out of the most innovative cases on the field in Spain (between 2013 and 2014), highlighted that journalistic innovation is produced on the sidelines of the traditional news industries and, for the most part, innovation is ex-

Table 2. Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas: Elements and sequence.

Partners 8 Help support the business model	Activities 7 Required to generate income; those with good performance	Value Proposal 1–2 Unique per segment (price, novelty, quality, convenience, status, performance, personalization)	Clients relations 4	Market Segment 1–2 Clients and organizations for whom value is created
	Resources 6 Assets requires for the business; infrastructure to create, deliver and provide value		Channels 3 Contact routes with the client to deliver value offer	
Cost structure: Based on the business model infrastructure 9 Balance with the revenue sources (not initially)			Revenue sources 5 Ways that generate value for the business model	

Source: Osterwalder (2010).

panding through native digital media, niche initiatives and new companies. The works of Bouwman, Nikou, Molina-Castillo, and de Reuver (2018) see the importance of digital social media networks and big data of the innovation and re-definition processes of the business models. On the other hand, Vukanovic (2018) presents that the detection of sustainable and hyper-competitive business models constitutes critical milestones. To reach them, Vukanovic underscores the relevance of multi-platform aggregated distribution, personalization and an improvement in user interface—viewed as navigation experience—in the development of new and more adequate business models.

3. Methodology and Instruments

The methodological proposal, of documentary and exploratory nature (Vilches, 2011), uses two work techniques: case studies and in-depth interviews. For once, the case study is a qualitative research method characterized by a first phase of information gathering in the topic and a second phase of analysis (Yin, 1989). Thus, facts and circumstances based on one or more hypotheses (presented in the introduction to this article) are described and there is a comparison or testing of these phenomena. It is, in essence, a structured inquiry around an example or best practice (Stake, 2005). The theoretical framework is based on the Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder, 2010) which determines the reach and methodology applied in the study. For this work, the case studies allowed for an examination of existent native digital platforms, make a selection (as a simple) and, finally, analyze them from two perspectives (on the one hand, their contents, and, on the other, their business model proposal).

The sample was defined as the set of elements from the population that were selected to be part of the research (Del Rincón, Arnal, Latorre, & Sans, 1995). In total, 14 media outlets of the Ibero-American digital native news media ecosystem were analyzed (see Table 3). The sample has been selected based on expert recommendations: 12 experts from Spain and Latin America (academics and journalists) were interviewed through a digital survey asking them to name the most relevant Ibero-American digital native news media, in terms of innovation and recognition.

Moreover, five aspects have been considered as requirements: 1) they had to be native digital media; 2) their operational sustainability; 3) all digital native news media selected had to be created within the last decade (between 2009 and 2019); and 4) the number of visits and followers in social media.

Cuba, despite its different political and economic system structure to the rest of the sample, has been included for many reasons. First, as mentioned, following Martin Serrano (2004), Galindo (2010) and Birle (2016), the country belongs to Ibero-America. Secondly, even if the country does not display a functioning capitalist system, its media system has been rapidly growing and many media companies have been created recently. These media companies must be sustainable in order to survive. In this specific case, Periodismo de Barrio is not only renowned and sustainable outlet, it has been recognized and has earned awards on journalism quality by Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano. Identifing reference media in terms of innovation and sustainability.

Native digital media experience a breaking point at the 5th year of existence, because almost 40% of them do not survive beyond that (Consejo de Redacción, 2018). Thus, the first criterion defined is for all digital native news media to have existed for at least five years. A second criterion that could be linked to a successful business model would be web traffic and network followers. Sembramedia, a not-for-profit NGO focused on advising and monitoring media entrepreneurship in Ibero-America, has a listing of native digital media categorized, among other criteria, by web traffic (measured as webpages views per month) per media outlet. It displays different categories (4,999 visits or less; between 24,999 to 49,999 visits; between 100,000 and 499,999; and between 500,000 and 999,999, among others). This research has taken into account those digital native news media with more than 24,999 visits. In each case, the analysis was done in a first phase, through a form (see Table 4) which included digital native news media typology, their thematic characteristics and, specially, the specifics of their business model.

In the second stage of the study, founders or directors of the main selected digital native news media were interviewed. Out of the 14 selected media outlets, ten directors responded (see Table 5). In-depth interviews, defined as an encounter with a structured technique, held between researcher and informant, and aimed at the understanding of the perspective held by the latter on diverse topics, experiences or situations (Del Rincón et al., 1995; Taylor & Bodgan, 2000), has allowed for access to the testimony of founders of eight of the selected digital native news media (Rodríguez, Gil Flores, & García Jiménez, 1996).

The interview, of a semi-structured nature, has been designed following an open-ended questionnaire, to elicit reflection of a qualitative kind. The questionnaire was validated by a panel of 10 experts in journalism. The participants were informed about the study and their consent was requested to take place in the study. The development and processing of the interview was undertaken between January and December 2019. The main thematic variables in the interview questionnaires have been structured upon the formulated hypotheses: 1) main traits in the applied business model; 2) justification in the election; 3) main revenue streams; 4) main challenges and difficulties; 5) future perspective and an analysis of possible trends in the sector; and 6) digital native news media of world reference.

Table 3. Table of selected digital native news media.

Digital native news media	Kien y Ke	Minuto 30	5W
Year of establishment	2010	2013	2015
Country	Colombia	Colombia	Spain
Type of organization	For profit	For profit	For profit
Traffic (number of visits)	—	1,000,000	—
Social Media			
Facebook	198,503	1,432,059	15,242
Twitter	225,200	598,500	42,600
Instagram	19,900	254,000	13,100
YouTube	66,000	—	—
Digital native news media	**Info Libre**	**Uno Cero**	**Animal Político**
Year of establishment	2013	2012	2010
Country	Spain	Mexico	México
Type of organization	For Profit	For Profit	For Profit
Traffic (number of visits)	—	—	—
Social Media			
Facebook	352,105	422,632	1,355,908
Twitter	270,400	224,400	2,100,000
Instagram	25,800	67,400	61,900
YouTube	—	—	—
Digital native news media	**GK**	**Plan V**	**Chequeado**
Year of establishment	2011	2013	2010
Country	Ecuador	Ecuador	Argentina
Type of organization	For profit	For profit	Not for profit
Traffic (number of visits)	499,999	99,999	999,999
Social Media			
Facebook	55,954	40,914	79,759
Twitter	23,100	52,200	257,000
Instagram	17,700	—	14,300
YouTube	—	—	—
Digital native news media	**El Definido**	**Armando**	**Radio Ambulante**
Year of establishment	2013	2010	2012
Country	Chile	Venezuela	Covers Latin America from the US
Type of organization	For profit	For profit	Not for profit
Traffic (number of visits)	—	49.999	99.999
Social Media			
Facebook	199,328	42,083	40,217
Twitter	24,000	90,200	307,600
Instagram	13,900	8,008	17,400
YouTube	161	1,420	3,702
Digital native news media	**Nómada**	**Periodismo de barrio**	
Year of establishment	2014	2015	
Country	Guatemala	Cuba	
Type of organization	For profit	Not for profit	
Traffic (number of visits)	999,999	24,999	
Social Media			
Facebook	172,137	8,503	
Twitter	115,500	3,461	
Instagram	26,400	1,917	
YouTube	4,810	—	

Source: Own data (2019).

Table 4. Digital native news media analysis.

Digital native news media profile
Year of establishment
Founders
Director
Themes
Sections
Type of content
Format
Value offer
Target public
Production and distribution system
Business model
Type of association
Type of business model
Revenue source

Source: Own development.

Table 5. List of interviewed directors.

Interviewee name	Position	Name of the media outlet
Elaine Díaz	Director	Periodismo de Barrio
Tania Montalvo	Main editor	Animal Político
Marta Arias	Director of Communication and Marketing	5 W
Jorge Pareja	Director General	Minuto30.com
Martín Rodríguez Pellecer	Director and CEO	Nómada
Elizabeth Correa Londoño	Content Director	Kienyke
Carolina Guerrero, Jorge Caraballo	Director and CEO Growth Editor	Radio Ambulante
Laura Zommer	Executive and Journalistic director	Chequeado
José Vicente González	Business develoment officer	Infolibre

Source: Own development.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings that we present here start from a documental analysis carried out about each of the media, as well as the responses given by the directors of the interviewed media.

4.1. Business Models Are Centered in Horizontality, Participation and Compromise

One of the four areas that make up Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas is the client's section, made up of the market, channel and relations segment. In this area, we found two types of media: 1) those that keep a classic conception of the client, as a company or institution who offer a given audience type for advertisement purposes, and 2) those who think of the content consumer as a media user. Although this is not a quantitative study, to answer our RQ1, only two out of 14 cases studied (KienyKe.com and Minuto30.com), have advertising companies as clients. The remaining 12 cases, think about audience in terms of the content consumer.

These 12 media outlets maintain a stable and open relation through dialogue between the audience and the editorial teams, to whom the audience is able to submit proposals about topic selection, as well as about the financial situation of the outlet. This relationship is developed through events, social media, Internet forums and fan clubs (see Figure 1).

The second area of the Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas is the offer. The offer refers to the value proposal. For these 12 media outlets there are also horizontal, participation and user engagement mechanisms, since media reinforce a sense of belonging and community representation through the triangulation of three actions: users propose topics, offer support in kind or money for their development and, afterwards, the media outlet provides a public budget review on the resources expended as an accountability measure (see Figure 2).

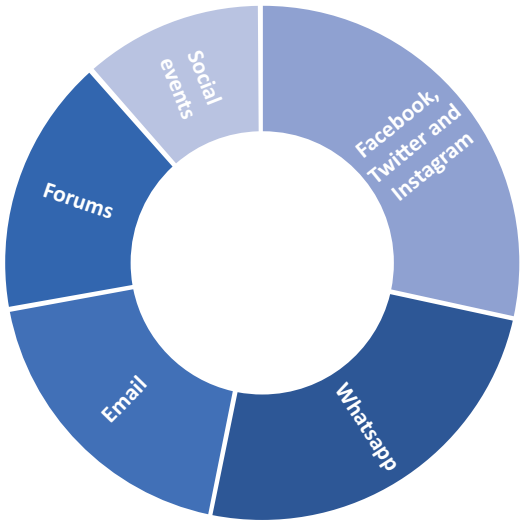

Figure 1. User contact channels. Source: Own elaboration.

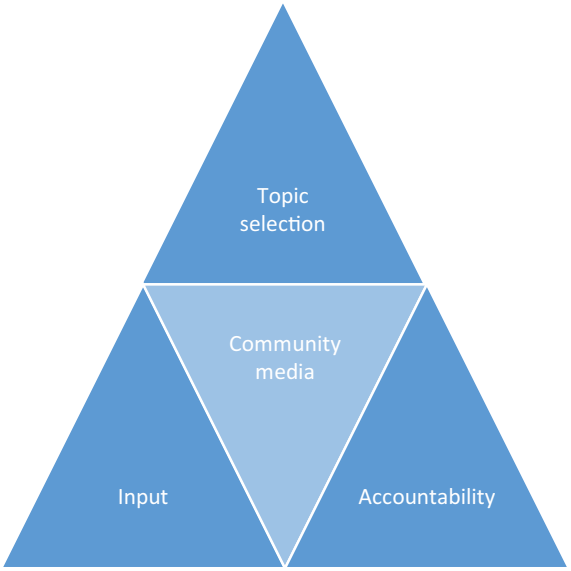

Figure 2. Community value matrix. Source: Own elaboration.

The set of these actions allows for the creation of a participative community, engaged with the value offer of the medium and their financial sustainability. For instance, Marta Arias, Director of Communication and Marketing of 5W, states that "what makes the project possible is not a banking institution but more than 3,000 [members] that pay an annual [subscription] fee to sponsor the creation of a different journalism" (Marta Arias, personal communication, November 12th, 2019). In the case of Chequeado, in contrast, participants not only contribute through fees, they also participate actively in the process of fact-checking themselves, assessing doubtful statements or providing extra information about news items.

4.2. Contents Offered Are Diverse and Hyperspecialized in Digital Native News Media

As for the content offer to address RQ2, the studied cases present specialization as recurrent. Besides examples of investigative journalism, we find fact-checking in the case of Chequeado, narrative podcasts related to Latin America (Radio Ambulante), minute-by-minute updates (Minuto30.com), technological dissemination (Unocero) and local journalism. Corruption and climate change seem to be the main focus of investigative journalism that brings proximity to its users.

The thematic agenda shows a prominence of topics related to inequality (mainly with minorities such as indigenous, women, children, etc.), politics (especially at the national level), corruption and international affairs (such as climate change or migration). Regarding the journalistic approach, we can observe a clear commitment to the use of narrative journalism and investigative journalism, with an effort to contextualize information (see Figure 3).

In the third area, Infrastructure, made of the resources, activities and key partners, we found a recurrent action thought in sequential organization from the production and distribution of content, through which the

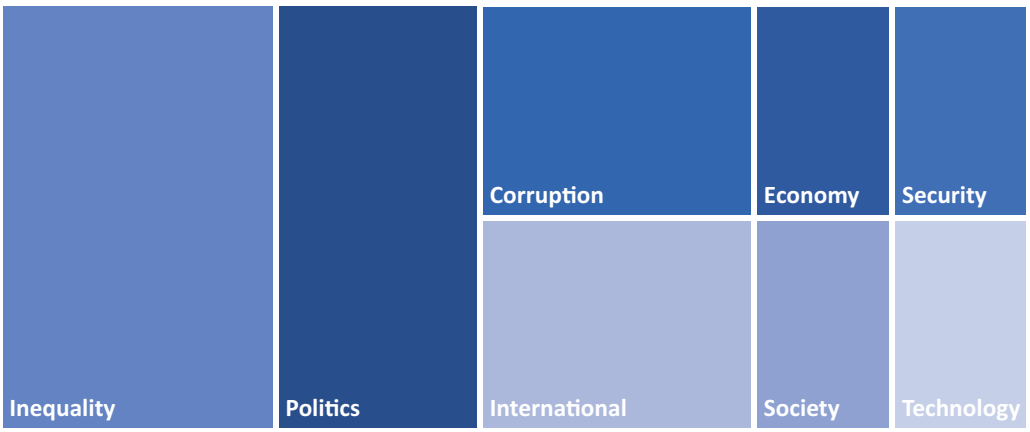

Figure 3. Main themes. Source: Own elaboration.

medium seeks to be positioned as a journalistic reference. To do so they define a productive structure from narrative multimedia logics, in that the journalistic team, with audiovisual producers and designers, create content that is exhibited in national and international contests and award ceremonies. In those spaces they create alliances with other media and organizations that diversify their spread of content. Nómada, for instance, includes among its key interest, that their content production satisfies quality requirements for awards and prizes (i.e., Premio Nacional de Periodismo de Guatemala-ISPS, UN Human Rights Award); as a communication strategy to achieve international recognition; Kienyke.com, meanwhile, organizes since 2013 a Festival called Festival de los Sentidos (Festival of the Senses), in partnership with academic institutions, to assess the journalistic environment and innovation. Similarly, Chequeado organizes an annual event called La Noche Del Chequeado (The Chequeado Night) (see Figure 4).

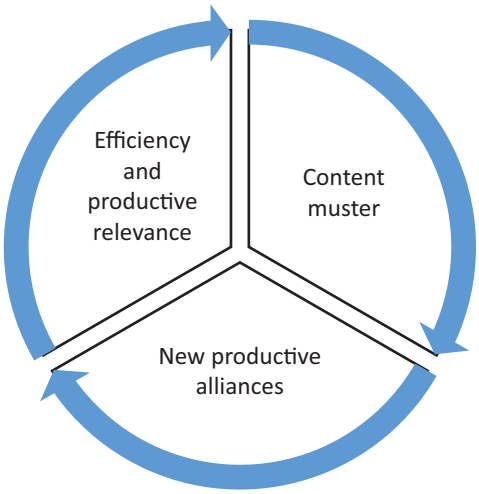

Figure 4. Sequence of activities with key partners. Source: Own elaboration.

4.3. Digital Native News Media Tend to Diversify Their Financing Sources

As answer to RQ3, there is a trend toward diversification of financial resources beyond advertisement. In fact, only two out of the 14 cases depend solely or mainly on advertisement revenue (Minuto30.com and Kyenyke). Most of the interviewees' reflections, in fact, agree with Carolina Guerrero, CEO of Radio Ambulante, who argues that "in a moment of uncertainty and precariousness in journalism, looking for different sources of financing is fundamental" (Carolina Guerrero, personal communication, November 26th, 2019).

The other 12 media openly discourage advertisement income (e.g., Armando.info, Periodismo de Barrio, El Definido, Nomada). One of the ways they hope to do this is by combining revenue streams, for instance, advertisement and crowdfunding, or even merchandising. However, the models found as the most sustainable are those that combine diverse financing ways (i.e., three or more revenue streams): Animal Político, Radio Ambulante, Nómada and GK. Nonetheless, scalable media are those which support their income in programmed advertisement, as in the case of Minuto30.com or KienyKe. Subscription, donations and professional services are growing sources of income, whereas crowdfunding and advertisement are in decline (see Figure 5).

The main advertising formats are banner type, high impact format, rich media, video, fixed presence and sponsorship, content marketing and social media content. For programmatic advertising on display and mobile, they use external agencies such as Google, Rubicon, Adsmovil, Headway, Adsamp, Smartad. For video they use Teads, Adman, Sunmedia, Latinon and Google and for social networks FBIA stands out. While for personalized content they make direct sales through their own commercial departments.

As for donations, we find two broad categories: financial donations and donations in kind. The financial ones come from international institutions that specialize in the development of emerging economies and media industries, such as the Ford Foundation, Hivos, Open Society Foundations, Free Press Unlimited and Planned Parenthood, or through micro-donations of the readers. Such is the case of Chequeado, which, according to Laura Zommer, receives different kinds of donation "that can vary from $2 to a $10,000 per year" (Laura Zommer, personal communication, November 5th, 2019). In kind donations are contributions in content made by independent experts and journalists, promoting a productive structure based on networks and communities.

The main results in this study are:

- Professional services include training and workshops, consultancy, design and content production for specific companies, or other short-term specific engagements.
- Memberships and subscriptions have an equal weight among the entire universe of sources of income. The subscription model is based on payment for content access, which is otherwise unavailable, while in the membership model, members pay fees even though content is always openly available (Rose, 2019). Being a member provides extra benefits such as a participation in the newsroom decisions, content proposal, etc.
- Quoting Martín Rodríguez Pallecer, Director and CEO Guatemalteca outlet Nómada, "Membership has a complete different philosophy compared to subscription: with membership you look for a permanent relationship with the reader" (Martín Rodríguez Pallecer, personal communication, November 21st, 2019).
- The membership model, in fact, prevails in media with a distinct civic aim, while subscription is present in media that have very specialized content, such as economics or politics. Laura Zommer,

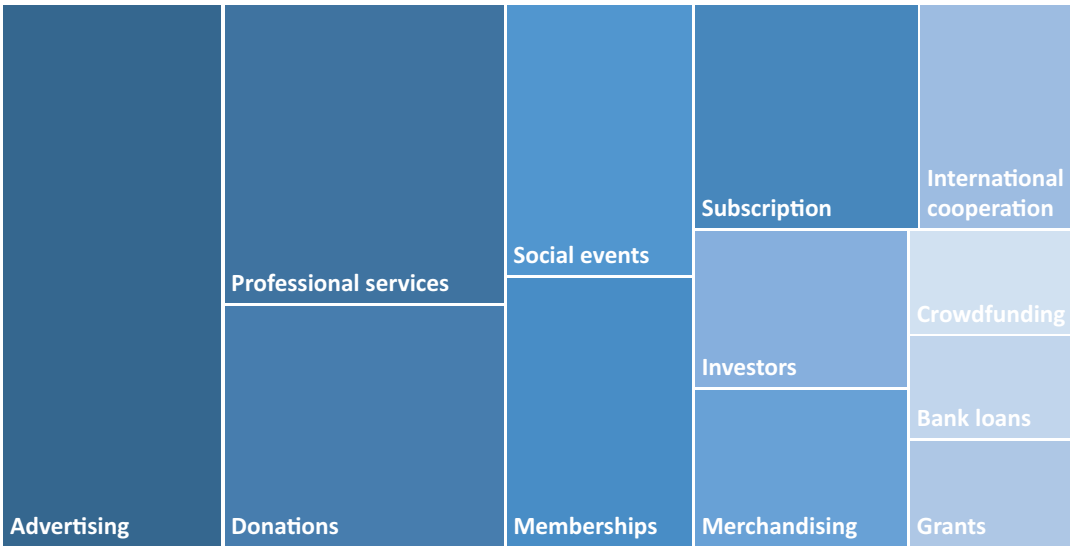

Figure 5. Financial resources most employed. Source: Own elaboration.

for example, states that Chequado "does not have clients, since it is a civic and community project" (Laura Zommer, personal communication, November 5th, 2019).

- International cooperation, although not a regular source of income, does contribute to financing journalistic projects towards which content is generated and through which the temporary coverage of the production costs of the medium is guaranteed. These journalistic projects financed with international cooperation focus on the themes defined by the Millennium Development Goals.
- Fund-raising events, as well as professional services, are also wide and diverse: from social and cultural meetings, to the hosting of conferences in public and academic institutions, alliances through which they analyze short-term problems of the country and the region.
- Merchandising, still in development, is presented as a booming financing mechanism. The sense of relevance and the brand as a differential value is exploited to generate economic resources and to build a community of users committed to the environment.
- Investors are other resources used by digital native media. These are usually the founders themselves, or the readers who participate as minority shareholder's associations. The case of InfoLibre is specifically interesting: the majority of its stockholders is made of journalists themselves, together with the "Sociedad de Amigos de InfoLibre" (Society of Friends of InfoLibre) who participate buying stock options for €400 to €12,000.
- Crowfounding, while still being used as a financing mechanism, is detrimental to the membership boom. The media consider that conducting a Crowfounding campaign is a high effort for the resources that are collected. Animal Politico, for example, launched a crowdfunding campaign that raised 3%–5% of the income, whereas membership fees raise 10% to 15%.
- Bank loans are used at two key moments: to establish start-up capital and to invest, once the medium is recognized among its community, in technological development.
- Subsidies are an economic aid that is also usually given in the first years of life of the environment. These come from national public institutions or international journalistic organizations.
- Media with a diversity of revenue sources try to make sure none of them represent more than 30% of the total income generated. While those that base their revenue in advertisement, even though they are a minority, hope to diversify their flow of traffic: direct 50%, SEO 30% and social media 20%, although, the last two work from programmed advertisement.
- Regarding the cost structure, the media analyzed put around 55% of revenue into supporting their productive structure. In this aspect, we find four categories based on personnel numbers. 33% has less than 10 full-time employees, 27% have between 11 and 20 professionals, 27% between 21 and 30 and the remainder 13% have more than 30 employees.

5. Conclusions

To answer our research questions, the results allow to point out that digital native news media in Ibero-America seem to share a horizontal, participatory organization geared towards engaging the public to build a cohesive community. For many of them, in fact, the creation of a community represents the core of their business model. According to Laura Zommer, for example, "having subscribers would be against Chequeado's DNA, since

members form a community that provides, above all, advice and sources, not only money" (Laura Zommer, personal communication, November 5th, 2019). Jorge Pareja, Director of Minuto30.com goes further by defining the medium as "community with a communication medium" (Jorge Pareja, personal communication, November 22nd, 2019).

In addition, the study concludes that there is a clear trend towards hyper thematization or the development of very specific content (such as, for example, fact-checking), or content for very specific niche audiences (hyper-local journalism). In terms of thematic areas, an abundance of content related to inequality, corruption, politics and social issues has been found. Finally, the trend towards the diversification of financial revenue beyond advertising sales is characterized.

To conclude, on the one hand the importance given to horizontality and user-engagement is core to these media, creating a more collaborative form of journalism, able to benefit from User-Generated Content and the active participation of the audience. In addition, the trend of creating a community of people sharing the same interests, implies that media working on specific thematic area are particularly welcomed. Accordingly, it seems that, in order to offer an alternative to legacy media, digital media should focus more and more on quality and investigative journalism. On the other hand, this content diversification, together with financial diversification, demands media flexibility, since the share of economic return for each type of revenue respond to cycles or stages of constant variation. Thus, regarding the creation and redefinition of the business model of digital native media, there is a need for a structure and personnel able to adapt to a constantly changing environment.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

The Emergence of Native Podcasts in Journalism: Editorial Strategies and Business Opportunities in Latin America

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Abstract
This article analyses the state of the art of podcasting in the new digital landscape as well as the structures, editorial strategies, and business models of native podcasts launched in Latin America over the last few years. To this end, a multiple case study has been made to examine the way new digital outlets are using audio content. This qualitative research is made up of a variety of approaches, such as interviews, online surveys of podcasters, as well as the collection and analysis of secondary data. A specific aim of this comparative study was to include a sample of podcasts produced by thirteen emerging media platforms from eight countries registered in the directory of digital natives conducted by SembraMedia (https://www.sembramedia.org). This is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the diversity and quality of Spanish language content by helping digital media entrepreneurs become more sustainable and successful. Results of this exploratory study reveal that native podcasting in Spanish is still expanding and that where the new media are small in scale, they are more oriented to the full exploitation of the narrative and innovative possibilities of this audio format and do not have responding to their target audiences' needs as their main priority. These new media are finding different ways to become monetised (mainly content production for clients, sponsored content, sponsorship, consulting services, and advertising) and to make a profit.

Keywords
business models; digital native news media; entrepreneurial journalism; online journalism; podcasting

Issue
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1. Introduction

In the era of multi-platform distribution, fragmented audiences, and the spread of content through social media, digitalization has bolstered new forms of doing journalism which aim to deliver news to audiences as fast and efficiently as possible. The so-called "new media" (Cabrera, Codina, & Salaverría, 2019) have not only been able to adapt themselves to the new scenario but also to be seen as an alternative to traditional news outlets (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). These digital journalistic platforms, also known as "digital native media" (Salaverría & Negredo, 2013, p. 175), provide easier access from any device globally, and produce instant, interactive, and multimedia content clearly oriented to the users' information needs (Pavlik, 2001, p. XI).

But media convergence—a process to reduce the cost of information production and to improve the accessibility and popularity of digital platforms (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2015; Quinn, 2006)—is what truly defined the notion of the active audiences within today's media industries and blurred the boundaries between production

and consumption of news (Schanke & Ytreberg, 2009). Likewise, the growing presence of prosumers in the media flow and the emergence of independent media operators have compelled legacy media to search for new journalistic strategies, formats, and narratives similar to those being developed by the new media.

In this context, podcasts have gained popularity among users and have aroused increasing interest within media outlets as news consumption on mobile devices has grown, and listening to linear radio has been disrupted by the rise of on-demand technology (Newman, 2018a). In fact, podcasting represents a "rupture of the traditional concepts of transmission-reception and synchrony" (Salgado, 2010, p. 136) in favour of portability, interaction, and the freedom to listen to any content.

Producing podcasts, as encapsulated audio files for download to be played on any device at any time, implies the involvement of an active audience who feels empathy with specific content and even "a higher level of complicity between the producer and the listener" (González-Alba, 2018). So, as Moreno-Cazalla (2017, p. 337) points out, changes in reception processes, the new time-space paradigm, and the content customisation are the key elements that explain the boom in podcasting. The rise of personal narratives, "intrinsically linked to the intimate nature of the audio medium" (Lindgren, 2016, p. 24), is one of journalistic storytelling's newest forms of innovation in to reach new audiences.

The evolution of this audio format, whose roots date back to 2001 (Sellas, 2011, p. 11) and which came of age in 2004, has been relentless. After an initial stage where podcasts were more radiogenic (Berry, 2006) and were mainly produced by amateurs (McClung & Johnson, 2010), these formats became "a distinct medium" (Berry, 2016, p. 1) or "a digital mass medium" (Bonini, 2015, p. 23) considering the manner in which they are produced and consumed. Since then, podcasts have quietly grown year by year, both in terms of producers and listeners: "It was estimated that in 2013 there were well over 250,000 unique podcasts in more than 100 languages available online" (Bottomley, 2015).

There are two main reasons for this development: the increasing interest in the podcast market by online platforms and tech giants such as Apple, Spotify, and Google, which "have begun making major investments in the medium" (Sullivan, 2019, p. 9); and the exponential growth in the number of mobile devices among the population. According to the *Global Digital Report 2019* (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019), the amount of smartphone users increases by 2% per year and the almost 4,000 million active mobile users in the world already spend half of their time on these small screens searching for information on the Internet. This fact is even clearer in the youngest age groups who definitely seem to have abandoned analogue radio (Pedrero, Barrios, & Medina, 2019).

In this new scenario, radio operators have been forced to assume that news consumption habits have changed forever and, consequently, they have had to invest more in digital audio in order to rethink their content production and delivery routines. In this sense, the increasing interest in podcasting turns out to be "like a second life" for radio programmes in digital environments (Sánchez, 2017, p. 158).

Different studies reflect this trend in the media industry. The *Digital News Report 2018* published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism indicates that more than a third of people interviewed had listened to a news-related podcast at least monthly although there was significant national variation. While in some Asia territories, podcasts are listened to by more than 55% of people, this audio format seems to be "least accessed in European countries with a strong audio tradition" such as the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, both with only 18% of listeners (Newman, 2018b).

This annual report also underlines how media outlets are employing this format as a way to directly connect with younger audiences, especially those under 35. This age group marks a clear division between the generation who prefers to consume podcasts and older listeners who "are twice as likely to consume traditional radio news" (Newman, 2019b). Some legacy media try to bridge the gap between "the new and the old" audiences by maintaining a balance in their content production and by working across all digital platforms (Lindeberg, 2019, p. 23).

Meanwhile, traditional journalistic brands are making a great effort to adapt themselves to the digital landscape and there has been a meteoric rise of new digital media or native cyber media (Salaverría, 2019). These projects stand out for having a diverse number of channels, formats, narratives, business models, and relationships with users (Toural & López, 2019). Some of these digital-native outlets chose podcasts as their sole (or main) production platform, which suggest that some quality attributes and journalistic consumption patterns are quite different to the legacy media production (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016).

Among those quality attributes linked to podcasts is personal branding for journalists. Previous research studies have highlighted the rise in native podcasts produced by experienced professionals who are making good use of this format to boost their personal brands, as happened to blogs some years ago (Demopoulos, 2006, p. 131). In this regard, López-Meri and Casero (2017) consider the creation of a personal brand as an ongoing process in which journalists take advantage of digital platforms, mainly social media networks, to show who they are, how they work, to set themselves apart from competitors, and be accepted by users.

Thus, podcasts have become a suitable format for journalists to create and highlight their personal brand and may also serve as a means to target specific audiences, to find a niche, or to engage in "hyper specialised" journalism (Rojas-Torrijos, 2018). In an era of increasing fragmentation of public attention across digital plat-

forms (Masip, Ruiz-Caballero, & Suau, 2019; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012), news podcasts may respond to specific information needs of audience segments who are not being properly informed by the generalist media.

Some studies have examined the patterns and motivations of podcast users and indicate two trends. On the one hand, audiences, even young people, are listening to podcasts that entertain and inform (Newman, 2019b, p. 62). This may explain why publishers are making investments in news podcasts, popularised in 2017 following the success of *The Daily* by *The New York Times* (Verdier, 2018). News podcasts have been defined as "regular-frequency multi-platform and on-demand podcasts produced by big media outlets to provide daily coverage of general interest news in a short format that lasts about 3–25 minutes" (Pérez & Lus, 2019, p. 326) and represent an opportunity for those companies to develop innovative storytelling techniques, build audience habits, and consolidate their brands.

On the other hand, one of the main motivations of using podcasts instead of linear radio includes developing audience interest into specific topics. Apart from suggesting that entertainment is the major motivation to choose the digital audio (McClung & Johnson, 2010) and that music is the most consumed type of media content (Edison Research, 2019), podcasts are appealing to users because they are able to attend to the personal interests of each user (Newman, 2019b), such as leisure, food, health, technology, or sports (Newman, 2018b). As a consequence, the range of podcasts is as wide as it is diverse, which explains the rapid development of this format (Sellas, 2011, p. 28).

Considering these motivations, those native news podcasts that are focused on specific topics or niche products seek competitive advantage by reaching and taking care of target audiences and then by drawing the attention of advertisers or clients to become profitable.

For entrepreneurs and independent podcasts producers, the monetization of the news product is essential. However, there are still too many open questions around the implementation and the public acceptance of payment models in the podcast industry. While this model is well established in countries that have a long tradition in podcasting such as the United States or the United Kingdom (Newman & Gallo, 2019; Sellas, 2011), in other markets such as Spain this journalistic product probably needs more time. The number of podcasts that are financially viable is still an exception in this country (Rouco, 2019).

The production of quality content in podcasts, the potential for niche journalism in this format, the opportunities for entrepreneurs, and the harmonisation of all this with an adequate business model shapes an ongoing debate on a sector that still is in its development stage. It will, therefore, be necessary to address the study of concrete cases to analyse the viability and potential of native podcasts in journalism.

2. The Study

Regarding this context, this article analyses the state of the art of native news podcasts launched in Latin America in recent years. In this research, we consider 'native' podcasts as those created solely for digital-only platforms and promoted by entrepreneurs or independent companies not associated with big media brands. Also, following the abovementioned authors Bonini (2015) and Berry (2016), we regard those news podcasts produced by audio-only or audio-first outlets as digital media themselves.

To this end, a multiple case study has been made to examine the way audio content is being used by new digital outlets in Spanish speaking countries. Although these markets still do not have the same level of development as in Anglo-Saxon countries, Latin America emerges as the area where the consumption of podcasts is growing faster. This is pointed out in the report published by Voxnest in the first quarter of 2019: Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Mexico, in this order, are the four countries with the highest predicted levels of podcast growth globally (Grey, 2019). This same report in 2018 highlighted a 13% year-on-year increase in the production of digital audio in Latin America and noted that Spanish language podcasts in are improving in quality and becoming more professional and diverse, thanks in part to the expansion of large platforms such as Spotify into the area (Voxnest, 2018).

Specific purposes of this comparative study include a sample of podcasts produced by thirteen emerging media platforms from eight countries registered in the directory of digital natives conducted by SembraMedia (https://www.sembramedia.org). This is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the diversity and quality of Spanish language content by helping digital media entrepreneurs become more sustainable and successful. Since its foundation in 2015, SembraMedia has mapped the digital media ecosystem in Latin America, Spain, as well as the Spanish speaking news outlets in the United States, and has built a regional network made up of more than 800 new media.

Latin America is still an outlying area in journalism studies and, more specifically, in Anglo-Saxon academic journals, which have been criticised for the lack of racial, national, and ethnic diversity within their editorial boards, topics, and authors (Usher, 2019). Meanwhile, the Spanish-speaking subcontinent emerges as a land of opportunity for digital entrepreneurs who are playing an increasingly important role in terms of innovation in journalism (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 6).

2.1. Hypothesis and Objectives

News native podcasts are still in an early phase of expansion and experimentation in Latin America and are an area of interest among entrepreneurs, who search for opportunities for profit within the media sector while the number of direct competitors is still low.

With this hypothesis in mind, the objectives of this multiple case study are:

RO1: To understand and evaluate the relevance of the creation and development of podcasts in the new media ecosystem and to explore the degree of journalistic entrepreneurship reached by this audio platforms in Spanish language;

RO2: To know the strategic planning approaches adopted by the promoters of these emergent journalistic projects in connection with their business missions, their clients and competitors, as well as their value propositions associated with certain contents;

RO3: To analyse the potential of podcasts to boost journalists' personal brands and to move towards niche or hyper specialised journalism in the media industry;

RO4: To examine the main motivations that led entrepreneurs to produce news and other journalistic content in this audio format;

RO5: To know the major revenue sources of the Spanish-language native news podcasts that have become monetised and to explore their financial profitability in both short and medium-term scenarios.

2.2. Methodology

We chose a qualitative case study design to respond to the research objectives. A case study design is applicable for identifying emerging themes and patterns as it enables the acquisition of rich and detailed data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Multiple cases are investigated to provide more accurate, generalisable, and robust results (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2009) and provide a stronger foundation on which to build theories (Yin, 2009).

We chose companies from the SembraMedia database. This directory comprises a sum of 767 digital media (September 2019), although only 80 of them provide any sort of audio format. Finally, we identified which outlets used podcasts as their main or only platform to produce and disseminate news, and obtained a sample of 20 media. We contacted all of them, but only 13 responded to our requests (Table 1).

We truly believe that this sample is appropriate for the goals of this exploratory research. Previous case study research in Social Sciences accepts that the number of participants may range between a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 10 according to the degree of thoroughness in the exploration (Eisenhardt, 1989; Rowley, 2002). To better conduct an in-depth analysis and an extensive collection of data for any organisation it is even advisable to take a limited number of cases (Yin, 2009).

Table 1. Native podcasts studied from SembraMedia database.

Name	Country	Economic Aim	Length of Service	Other platforms
Revista 070	Colombia	Nonprofit	>3 years	Website
Coloquio	Puerto Rico	Nonprofit	>3 years	App, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo
Parque Podcast	Argentina	Profit	2–3 years	Website, Facebook, Twitter
Las Raras Podcast	Chile	Nonprofit	>3 years	Website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo
Libertarias	Dominican Republic	Nonprofit	<1 year	Facebook, Radio online, Instagram
Wetoker	Argentina	Profit	>3 years	Website, Newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Los Puentes Digitales	Spain	Profit	>3 years	Website, App, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Patreon
Latitud 25	Paraguay	Profit	>3 years	Website, TV, Facebook, Radio online, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo
Akorde Podcast	Colombia	Profit	>3 years	Website, Blog, Newsletter, Facebook, Radio online, Twitter
Posta	Argentina	Profit	>3 years	Website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Grupo Naranja Media	Colombia	Profit	>3 years	Blog
Relato Nacional	Chile	Profit	>3 years	Website, Facebook, Twitter
UyCast	Uruguay	Profit	1–2 years	Website, Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Instagram

Source: SembraMedia (2019).

As a matter of fact, case study samples do not exactly represent a concrete universe of participants, so that the results obtained will not show the validity of the statistical representativeness and, consequently, should not be extended as a general rule for an entire population. This approach involves understanding the characteristics of a phenomenon in its context in such a way that the analytical findings are more widely applicable (Hartley, 1994). Gummesson (2000) suggests that this qualitative method seeks to comprehend processes, to provide frameworks, and to identify driving forces rather than to determine exact cause-and-effect correlations.

We interviewed the podcast providers from the SembraMedia database. They were asked about their business missions, their clients and competitors, their value proposals associated with certain contents, and the main reasons that they chose to use podcasts.

Likewise, they received an online survey by email, later reinforced via telephone, Twitter, and Facebook. The closed-ended questions were intended to learn more about their business models, the monetisation of the projects, and, more specifically, expenditure items and revenue sources.

The information gathered from the answers in the interviews and the survey was finally completed with the lookup on the SembraMedia database and on the platforms of each project.

The fieldwork was conducted in 2019, between October and November. The qualitative information obtained has been handled with the data analytics software ATLAS.ti (version 8).

To develop a more accurate data analysis with ATLAS.ti, all the questions were categorised and codified. The function "wordcruncher" was applied to explore each category/question so as to identify the most commonly used terms and expressions in their replies. Any relevant word or phrase was automatically codified in a news process to compare the qualitative results. The coding system was built by combining codes derived from both theory and data analysis. The codes used in this research are the ones identifies in Figure 1.

3. Results

The native news podcasts are still small in scale. None of the cases studied has been promoted just by one person. The average number of entrepreneurs is three people per podcast, with 44% being women. Regarding the staff, these projects have an average of 4.2 employees and a significant percentage of women (50%).

This last percentage may imply that the new media companies are making efforts to balance the participation of male and female reporters in the production of news. This fact becomes especially relevant in journalism, which is still a male-biased sector where women usually have difficulty gaining positions of responsibility within the companies (Caro-González, García-Gordillo, & Bezunartea, 2014; De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Djerf-Pierre, 2007).

Besides, the presence of female journalists in native podcasts is slightly higher than in the rest of the media entrepreneurships in Latin America, where only 40% of the founding members are women (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 9).

3.1. The Description of the Organisations

First of all, the promoters of native podcasts were asked to give a brief description of their organisations. To describe a project is important to take into account the essential elements for any entrepreneur. As a general rule, they have to answer three questions: "What are we doing? For whom? And How?" (Caro-González, 2007, pp. 92–93).

The first question may result in two possible outcomes: the traditional product-oriented strategy, in which they basically explain the format; and the market-oriented approach, where they plan the project according to news demands from certain audiences. 11 out of the 13 studied media referred to the product—"creation, production, and delivery of podcasts" (Akorde Podcast interview)—while just 7 mentioned clients and their needs: "We seek to educate through the stories" (*Grupo Naranja Media* interview), or "to bridge the gap between

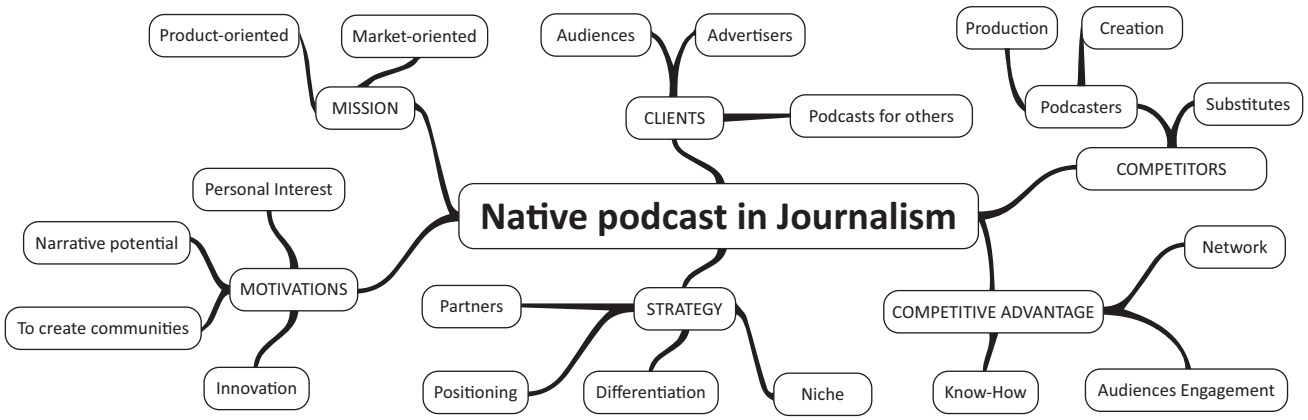

Figure 1. Conceptual map of codes. Source: Author's analysis.

academic research and new forms of storytelling in journalism practice" (*Revista 070* interview).

Concerning the 'For whom' question, 4 out of the 13 new media keep their clients in mind when they describe their projects, even profiling the different markets in which they operate: listeners, advertisers, and third-party production entities. *UyCast*, for instance, identifies "other media or organisations and original production for advertising companies" as clients (*UyCast* interview).

They also refer to basic intangible aspects such as the importance of the culture and values of the organisation. Just three of the projects underline that they create content from a new and independent approach: "Alternative information about politics, culture, gender, and news" (*Latitud 25* interview) or "against algorithms" (*Wetoker* interview).

Some of the promoters also include references to some distinguishing features of their projects, such as the geographical spread and the brand positioning: "We are the first podcast network in the city of Cordoba, Argentina" (*Parque Podcast* interview).

In general, these native podcasts are clearly more product-oriented and do not have meeting the specific news demands of their audiences as the main priority. The people interviewed explain what they do but not for whom they do it or why.

3.2. Clients

The second open question addressed to the promoters was about their clients. 11 out the 13 cases mention their audiences as clients, 4 refer to advertising companies, and 5 specify other organisations for whom they produce podcasts.

The data they gather from their audiences are highly uneven. *Relato Nacional* provides information on their listeners by gender and age: "Gender: women 54%, men 44%. Age: 36% between 28 and 34 years old, 22% between 35 and 44, 21% between 23 and 27, 10% between 45 and 59, 9% between 18 and 22" (*Relato Nacional* interview). Nevertheless, other cases such as *Coloquio* do not yet have any data because it is not provided by their hosting platform.

In general, these native podcasts target young listeners, those aged up to 35. The highest level of detail in the definition of the audience comes from *Posta*: "It is gender-balanced, the core is between 25 and 35, mobile, permanently connected, online buyer, pay subscriber, niche consumer, willing to spend time on content they are keen on" (*Posta* interview).

Meanwhile, other projects observe that their audiences are being reshaped due to changes in the market caused by the expansion of Spotify in Latin America: "Since that arrival audiences have been growing, changing and becoming more diverse. This is why at this moment we need some more time to rethink our strategy and redefine our target audience" (*Wetoker* interview).

Regarding the advertising market, the projects do not provide enough information to better identify and quantify their clients: "They are small brands that seek to differentiate themselves" (*Parque Podcats* interview) or "they match with our brand and audiences' values" (*Posta* interview). Five of these entrepreneurships state they do not have any advertisers.

Moreover, these new media provide podcast production services for organisations that want to take advantage of this format as part of their content strategy. These clients, ranging from university departments and NGO's to private companies, were identified in 5 out of 13 cases in this study.

3.3. Competitors

The state of the competition is one of the key elements to estimate the probability of success of any new media. Likewise, it is a way to determine the extent to which this format commands the attention of entrepreneurs.

In this case study, despite the promoters' perception that, in general, there is a growing interest in the podcast format, promoters scarcely consider that they have competitors. In several cases, when referring to other podcast projects in their markets they state that they are not actually competitors but companies that use the same format to reach different targets: "Those projects found their own voice within this ecosystem so there are no direct competitors for us" (*Revista 070* interview); "there is not any podcast with our same approach" (*Coloquio* interview).

Some projects do mention other native podcasts although they do not explain how they compete against them in advertising resources and audiences. To name a few: *Radioambulante* (*Las Raras Podcast*); *Segmento radial* and *Podcast Insumisas* (*Libertarias*); *Posta Fm* and *Parque podcast* (*Wetoker*); *Convoy*, *Así como suena* and *Dixo* (*Puentes Digitales*); *El Surtidor*, *GEN* and *AAM* (*Latitud 25*); *Radio Ambulante* and *Las raras podcast*, *Caseritas*, *Café con Nata* and *Con la ayuda de mis Amikas* (*Relato Nacional*); *Polenta*, *Caramba* and *Dobcast* (*UyCast*). Besides, *Posta* and *UyCast* distinguish between production competitors and creation competitors.

However, those projects that do not mention their current competition have become aware of their potential competitors. More specifically, these projects see how there is an increasing number of traditional media outlets "that are breaking into the podcast market" and "even in some cases are the same ones to whom we supply with consultancy and other services" (*Posta* interview). *Grupo Naranja Media* considers the podcasts "major competitors are substitute products such as video or blogs because many companies still do not know the audio format well, or its advantages" (interview).

In other words and following Porter's (1980) "broad competitive scope" perspective, podcasting in Latin America is still at an early stage of development but, despite being a differentiated product in a sector with little internal rivalry, the audio format may attract some

competitive forces, such as new entrants and substitute products, into the market.

3.4. New Digital Media Advantages

Once the podcast promoters identified their competitors, they had to explain the characteristics that help their value propositions attract the clients' attention.

Here the answers varied widely. Some of the entrepreneurs regard the strategic alliances and the relationships with clients as their main competitive advantage (*Revista 070*, *Wetoker* and *Latitud 25* interviews), while others emphasised the specific nature of the project and the niche marketing approach as their strengths (*Las Raras Podcast* and *Los Puentes Digitales* interviews). *UyCast*, for example, underlines "a better engagement with female audiences," while others refer to their brand positioning (*Posta* interview).

They also mention the added value their podcast provides to certain clients: "It helps create a personal brand and many stakeholders want to take part in this ecosystem to gain value" (*Wetoker* interview).

Finally, some podcast promoters consider that their strengths are internal aspects related to quality and production processes (*Relato Nacional* interview). For instance, *Grupo Naranja Media* refers to "the expertise in a narrative that ensures an audience retention rate higher than 70%, the understanding of the format and the harnessing its advantages to enhance our show" (interview).

Other competitive advantages come from their own staff: the know-how and the professional experience (*Los Puentes Digitales* and *UyCast* interviews) or their staff's multidisciplinary education including journalism, technology, and marketing (*Akorde Podcast* and *Posta* interviews).

3.5. Why Podcasting?

The next question intended to find out the reasons why these entrepreneurs decided to produce podcast content. According to their answers, we identify some intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

In the first answers, some promoters admit they chose this audio format as a consequence of their personal interest (*Revista 070* and *Wetoker* interviews), while the second answers indicate external aspects that acted as incentives for them, such as trends in the media industry. Some entrepreneurs declare they produce podcasts because it's a new format and it means innovation (*Coloquio* and *Las Raras Podcast* interviews).

The most frequent motivation has to do with the narrative potential of podcasts:

- "To explain—without impoverishing—complex issues" (*Revista 070* interview);
- "Versatility, production facilities, adaptability, on-demand nature, gratuity and easy delivery" (*Parque Podcast* interview);
- "To connect feature written stories with the radio world" (*Relato Nacional* interview);
- "This format is the future for the new opportunities it offers" (*Wetoker* interview);
- "To reach depth in an entertaining manner in a wide variety of topics" (*Grupo Naranja Media* interview).

Last but not least, there are some motivations determined by the media market: Podcasts are used because the number of people who listen to this format is growing and, consequently, is an opportunity for them to reach wider audiences (*Libertarias* and *Posta* interviews) or to create communities and interact with clients (*Los Puentes Digitales* and *Latitud 25* interviews).

3.6. Business Models

Hereafter, the promoters of the new audio platforms were asked about the relevance of certain revenue sources and expenditure items. For this question, we employed a Likert-type scale to offer the respondents five possible quantitative values to weight the importance of income and expenses involved in their respective projects. An average of each revenue source and expenditure item was calculated from the total sum of replies.

For instance, in the case of 'sponsorship' (Table 2), the 13 podcasters gave the following values: 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1, 5, 3, 1, 4, 4, 4. The resulting average is 2.46 and the sum of all revenues sources values is 30.49. Consequently, the real importance of revenue sources is at a rate of 8%.

These answers highlight which streams are key to success in these projects.

Table 2. Revenue sources.

Revenue Source	Importance (%)
Content production for clients	12%
Sponsored content	8%
Sponsorship	8%
Consulting services	8%
Advertising	8%
Subscriptions	7%
Foundations and grants	7%
Training services	6%
Donations	6%
Events	6%
Crowdfunding	5%
Profitable memberships	5%
Content syndication	4%
E-commerce	4%
Government funds	4%
Pay-per-use	3%
	100%

Source: Author's analysis.

Remarkably, content production for clients, in general, is the main revenue source in the cases studied (Table 2). Six out of the 13 promoters regard this item as their first priority. So, the monetisation of these podcasts is achieved by creating content for private companies or public organisations. The other major revenue sources, in order of importance, are sponsored content, sponsorships, consulting services, and advertising. It can be noted that these new media might run into financial difficulty if they were only able to rely on direct contributions from the audiences (subscriptions, memberships or crowdfunding). It is also noteworthy that these audio platforms need to diversify their incomes to survive.

To supplement the results of the study, the podcasters interviewed were asked to indicate the importance of the different expenditure items in their organisations. Table 3 shows that the largest item of expenditure is the staff and their salaries, ahead of financial costs and the use of digital technologies (network servers and software).

Table 3. Types of expenses.

Types of Expenses	Importance (%)
Salaries	17%
Financial costs	15%
Network servers	14%
Software	12%
Others	12%
Electricity, water, and other supplies	11%
Office rental	11%
Depreciation of equipment	10%
	100%

Source: Author's analysis.

Finally, the ratio of revenue to expense leads us to ask about the profitability of these projects. As shown in Figure 2, the podcasters interviewed consider their respective platforms as being either already profitable (31%), or likely to become a lucrative business in the short- (15%) or medium-term (54%).

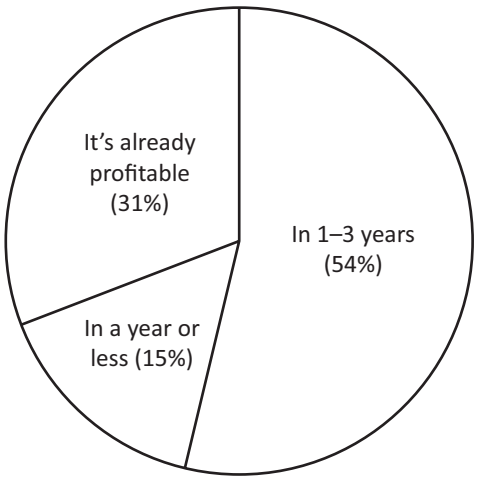

Figure 2. In what period of time do you think your podcast will become profitable? Source: Author's analysis.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this case study confirm the abovementioned hypothesis: News native podcasts are still in an early phase of expansion and experimentation in Latin America, are a field of interest among entrepreneurs, are small in scale, and they are searching for business opportunities, new relationships with audiences, and strategic alliances with clients.

Moreover, the findings respond to our five research objectives. First, to understand and explore the degree of journalistic entrepreneurship reached by podcast projects in Latin America (RO1), results show that these news audio products provided by independent media outlets are in an early stage of development in the subcontinent. In the case of podcasts taken from the SembraMedia database (2019), 60% of the projects were founded after 2014 and 92% were created after 2010. Even so, the audio-only or audio-first news outlets only represent a mere 10% in this directory.

Likewise, news podcasting generates interest from journalistic entrepreneurs who search for opportunities to profit from the media sector while the number of direct competitors is still small. In this regard, findings also provide a greater understanding of the strategic planning approaches adopted by the promoters of these emergent journalistic projects regarding their business missions, their clients, and competitors (RO2).

The promoters of these new media highlight that these audio platforms are more oriented to the full exploitation of the narrative and innovative possibilities of this audio format and do not have responding to their target audiences' needs as their main priority. This fact suggests that further business training for entrepreneurial journalists may be necessary so that they can make their projects focused more on the examination of news opportunities in targeted audiences than in the use of new technologies. Fulfilment of the audiences' unmet needs is likely to occur irrespective of the medium or format employed to appeal to them.

Interestingly, three of these projects regard themselves as 'alternative media,' producing content especially addressed to minorities and covering topics and issues that are usually ignored by traditional media.

Besides, it is clear for the Latin American podcast providers that their audience is young, as observed by Newman (2019b). Despite this assumption, the strategic planning approaches adopted by these media exhibit a general lack of knowledge concerning their main target groups. This situation may impede not only their design and implementation of any news service but also their ability to reach advertisers and other clients.

These digital media assume they benefit from two advantages that distinguish them from competitors: occupying a market niche or offering a news service with a

unique approach. In general, they perceive that there is a low level of competition.

To analyse the potential of podcasts to boost a journalists' personal brand (RO3), it should be noted that none of the media outlets studied have been promoted just by one person. Thus, from this research, we cannot establish a direct connection between podcasting and the potential of this emergent medium to expand a journalists' personal brand. This is probably due to the fact that such professional podcasting involves greater technical complexity and more investment in technical equipment and, as a result, it may require the participation of a number of professionals.

In accordance with Toural and López (2019), the digital media outlets in this research use a combination of platforms to produce and disseminate news. The most frequently employed are Facebook and Twitter, followed by Instagram, YouTube, mobile apps, and newsletters.

The results of this study also point out some of the motivations that led entrepreneurs to news podcast production (RO4). While this audio format generates interest for its potential to innovate in narratives (Lindgren, 2016; Pérez & Lus, 2019) or the opportunity to reach younger audiences, the promoters appear not to have considered all of the aspects outlined by scholars such as portability and synchrony (Salgado, 2010). On the contrary, they consider podcasts as having the potential to build new relationships with audiences by generating communities (González-Alba, 2018).

Regarding their business models and the chances of monetisation (RO5), the podcasters emphasized the relevance of diversifying revenue sources in order to ensure the viability of their entrepreneurships. Among the variety of ways these news media have found to monetise themselves, content production for clients (private companies or public institutions) is particularly important.

This result contrasts with the survey conducted by SembraMedia (2016) among digital media registered in its database. That study concluded that the main revenue sources for the new journalistic projects in Latin America were banners, native adverts or sponsored content, and consulting and training services. However, the monetisation of podcasts via subscriptions still seems to be difficult. This revenue source ranks in the sixth position according to the promoters' responses.

As usual in media companies, salaries earned by employees represent the most important expenditure item for these Latin American journalistic projects. It is encouraging that the podcasters interviewed consider their media are already profitable or may become lucrative within three years. This variety of income-generating activities may serve as a safeguard for these new media that have started to discover podcasts as a route to make journalism more profitable.

This article sheds light on news podcasting in Latin America which has been an underexplored area in journalism studies. It also outlines some editorial approaches and business models of audio digital media registered in the main directory of digital natives in the subcontinent to better understand an emerging phenomenon in Spanish-speaking markets.

However, some limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The first is related to the sample size. The reduced number of units of analysis makes it difficult to generalise the results, although the main goal of this case study is to provide key elements to explain a new and complex phenomenon.

The second limitation is a consequence of the geographic distance and the lack of physical accessibility to participants in the study. This prevented us from holding face-to-face interviews with entrepreneurial journalists to be able to carry out a more thorough analysis and gain in-depth knowledge about the research topic.

Further research is needed to better understand the emergent production and consumption of news podcasts in Latin American markets. On the one hand, this article will be complemented with an additional sub-study of the contents of each podcast provider in order to explore and compare their characteristics such as formats, topics, frequencies, and production routines. On the other hand, this research will need to be updated in three years since the digital media companies analysed assert they already are, or are going to be, profitable by the end of this period. Thus, further research will verify the evolution of these journalistic entrepreneurships and their strategic approaches.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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